



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the
INTERNATIONAL
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International Environment Forum a Baha'i inspired organization addressing
the environment and sustainable development

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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org

Please share the *Leaves* newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

**22nd Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum
in support of the United Nations High Level Political Forum
New York, 9-18 July 2018**

The 22nd Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum was a series of activities in support of the UN High Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in New York on 9-18 July 2018. The events were planned primarily to allow participation at a distance, to avoid the cost and environmental impact of many members travelling to New York. In the preparations for the HLPF, the IEF provided inputs to the official Scientific and Technological Major Group paper for the HLPF.

Organizing the IEF 22nd Conference as a set of supporting activities to a major UN event like the HLPF allowed us to continue our efforts to participate actively in the public discourse around sustainable development, as we did at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 and Rio+20 in 2012, at a time when the urgency of action is greater than ever.

IEF VIRTUAL PANEL at the UN High Level Political Forum

2018 July 9-18, New York City, USA

To save HLPF participants from the effort of finding a meeting room to hear a panel of experts on the themes of the 2018 HLPF, the International Environment Forum invited its experts to record their short presentations on YouTube, so that HLPF participants could watch them whenever and wherever convenient on their smartphone or tablet. Seven short video presentations were prepared for this "Panel on Your Smartphone".

These were publicized on the Internet distribution lists for Major Groups and Stakeholders at the HLPF. The written texts for most of them were also available on the IEF web site, and are included further down in this newsletter.

Texts & Introductions from the IEF PANEL at the UN High Level Political Forum

Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

by Arthur Dahl at https://youtu.be/lox_vzhsLBo (8 minutes) [FULL TEXT](#) (or see full text below)
Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum, and a retired senior official of UN Environment, comments on the overall theme of the 2018 UN High Level Political Forum.

Water, Sanitation and Freshwater Ecosystems: Challenges in Tanzania (SDG 6)

by Mark Griffin at <https://youtu.be/c-nNQb1e2f4> (11:30 minutes) [FULL TEXT](#) (or see full text below)
Mark Griffin explores the multiple difficulties involved in trying to provide a school in rural Tanzania with a safe and reliable water supply.

The challenges that a renewable energy matrix bring to the academic world (SDG 7)

by Rafael Shayani, Universidade de Brasília, at <https://youtu.be/HfgyrHlhpsz> (8 minutes) [FULL TEXT](#) (or see full text below)
Prof. Rafael Amaral Shayani, Universidade de Brasília, Departamento de Engenharia Elétrica, Laboratório de Fontes Renováveis de Energia, discusses the need for broader education for energy planners.

Responsible consumption and production (SDG12)

by Arthur Dahl, International Environment Forum, at <https://youtu.be/i8TQh-ZZovs> (10 minutes) [FULL TEXT](#) (or see full text below)
Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum, who has worked for half a century on sustainability issues, explores the deeper meaning of our consumption and production behaviour.

How can we reduce excessive consumption? (SDG12)

by Christine Muller <https://youtu.be/dM4bxwJ66sc> (8 minutes) [FULL TEXT](#) (or see full text below)
Christine Muller of the International Environment Forum helps us to address the challenge of reducing our excessive consumption.

Sustainable forestry in DR Congo (SDG15)

by John Kendall <https://youtu.be/LWsgfOlpxY> (13 minutes) [INTRODUCTION](#)
Canadian forester John Kendall makes the case that a high level of community transformation is necessary for REDD+ (forest management for carbon sequestration) to deliver on climate change and SDG 15 objectives. He uses his Mai Ndombe REDD+ project in the DRC as a case study in community engagement.

Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (SDG15)

by Laurent Mesbah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz4VCM97bjI> (16:43 minutes) [INTRODUCTION](#)
Professor Laurent Mesbah of the American University in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, explores our scientific and aesthetic ties with nature, and the lessons we learn from the rich biodiversity of the natural world.

RESPONSIBILITY ROULETTE

The IEF also co-sponsored and contributed to a HLPF side event called "Responsibility Roulette" at Scandinavia House on 12 July that IEF Governing Board member Victoria Thoresen organized through the Partnership for Education and Research About Responsible Living (PERL), in which IEF is an active participant. The aim was to learn how sustainable lifestyles can become more desirable, accessible and normal.



PERL workshop

Shifting towards more sustainable ways of living requires people individually and collectively to understand how their lifestyles and behaviours influence the global pursuit of sustainable development. The workshop asked whose responsibility it is to change existing unsustainable aspirations and systems into ones that promote sustainable development for all. This is a fundamental challenge for everyone whether we function in governments, business, advertising, civil society, education, or simply as individuals.



Workshop participants; Lewis Akenji, Erik Assadourian, Arthur Dahl

The workshop was organized as an interactive game in which everyone participated including the panel of invited international experts. Three roulette wheels determined which participant would speak, what issue would be addressed, and how it would relate to one of the SDGs, to demonstrate that they were all integrated and interrelated. The game allowed the whole group to explore what a happier, healthier and more sustainable lifestyle is, and who has what responsibility for making sustainable lifestyles the norm and not the exception. The game helped everyone to examine essential ingredients of living well: family and community, time as a resource, freedom and discovery, and balancing obligations and wishes. It assisted all the participants in reflecting on relevant strategies for achieving sustainable lifestyles — strategies such as deciphering the systemic nature of lifestyles, taking advantage of life stages and transitions, accommodating diversity in lifestyles, and engaging in collective action.



Erik Assadourian, Lewis Akenji, Victoria Thoresen; Christine Muller (centre) and Lewis

IEF members Victoria Thoresen and Arthur Dahl, along with Lewis Akenji from the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) in Japan, Erik Assadourian of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington, D.C., Dorothy Marcic, a professor of business, author and playwright of popular off-Broadway shows, and Vanessa Timmer, Executive Director of One Earth, Vancouver, Canada, were the international experts invited to participate in the workshop. Artist Andrea Hvistendahl of Stockholm presented student artworks expressing sustainability and sustainable lifestyles, and there was an exhibition of education for sustainable lifestyle initiatives from around the world. IEF member Christine Muller was one of the participants.

Leveraging innovative partnerships with higher education institutions towards sustainable and resilient societies

IEF Governing Board member Victoria Thoresen of PERL also contributed to a SDGs Learning, Training and Practice event in the UN Building on **Leveraging innovative partnerships with higher education institutions towards sustainable and resilient societies** organized by the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative

SDGs Learning, Training and Practice Wednesday 11 July 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Organized by • Higher Education Sustainability Initiative • Harvard University • PERL • University of Bergen, Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation • University of Oxford • University of Sao Paulo • Pan African University Institute of Water and Energy Sciences

Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

by Arthur Dahl at https://youtu.be/lox_vzhsLBo

Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum, and a retired senior official of UN Environment, comments on the overall theme of the 2018 UN High Level Political Forum.

What do we mean by transformation? The Secretary-General, in his synthesis report on the Post-2015 Agenda, said that

- fundamental transformation is needed in society and the economy, with the
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defining a paradigm shift for people and planet
- inclusive and people-centred, leaving no one behind
- integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions
- in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, mutual accountability

- with the participation of governments and all stakeholders ([UN 2014](#)).

This is clearly not business as usual.

The results of science in various fields are signalling the urgency of the necessary transformation, and the response so far has been too slow. On 13 November 2017, a warning supported by more than 15,000 scientists reviewed the status of the world environment since a first warning 25 years ago, and showed that almost all the trends were negative. They concluded:

"To prevent widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss, humanity must practice a more environmentally sustainable alternative to business as usual. This prescription was well articulated by the world's leading scientists 25 years ago, but in most respects, we have not heeded their warning. Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory, and time is running out. We must recognize, in our day-to-day lives and in our governing institutions, that Earth with all its life is our only home." (Ripple et al. 2017).

Science can do much to define the directions that the transformation should take, depending on the country situation (O'Neill et al. 2018), and to recommend the speed with which actions should be taken to avoid extreme or irreversible damage to human interests or the environment on which we depend. The warnings are becoming increasingly strident. Transformation cannot be just superficial tinkering at the margins, but rapid and fundamental change. We have no time to lose.

However scientific knowledge by itself rarely changes human behaviour. Knowledge needs to be coupled with an emotional response, and this is often best triggered by a call to ethics, values and faith.

Change at this level must start with our basic assumptions about human nature and purpose. Are we inherently aggressive and self-centred, or should we not rather aspire to justice, solidarity, generosity, altruism and service to the common good? The SDGs are a framework for expressing the oneness of humankind in the expression "leave no one behind". They require both structural transformation in our institutions of governance, and social transformation in how we organize society and the economy, based on a new shared value system. Our actions need to be in coherence with SDG values in our collective search for viable solutions to the world's problems. Our challenge today, especially at the HLPF, is to rise above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action.

Sustainable is another word that we all can agree on without sharing a common definition, which is convenient for diplomats. It is not a goal that we reach but a dynamic balance that we have to maintain over time into the distant future. How can a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population, in a just manner, live in harmony

with the planet and its finite natural resources? Endless economic growth is not the answer. Neither are fear of the "others", marginalization and exclusion of other human beings, and disregard for their suffering. Social distress is inherently unsustainable and a source of insecurity.

It is worth also reflecting on the meaning of resilience. It can mean resistance to shocks or the ability to bounce back, implying strong social cohesion. It also means reimagining the economic sphere so that it is socially just, altruistic and cooperative, creating meaningful work for all and eliminating poverty as called for in the SDGs. The result can be collective prosperity through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance. Today the world still has ample food and economic resources for everyone, but there are problems of access and equitable distribution, with increasing extremes of wealth and persistent poverty. Reducing inequality is also a SDG, not through charity but by finding ways to address the root causes of poverty.

The international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith has recently written:

"The stresses emerging out of the long-term process of transition from a divided world to a united one are being felt within international relations as much as in the deepening fractures that affect societies large and small. With prevailing modes of thought found to be badly wanting, the world is in desperate need of a shared ethic, a sure framework for addressing the crises that gather like storm clouds." (UHJ 2017)

To end on a positive note from a Bahá'í International Community statement to the UN:

"The pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness." (BIC 2010)

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Water, Sanitation and Freshwater Ecosystems: Challenges in Tanzania (SDG 6)

by Mark Griffin at <https://youtu.be/c-nNQb1e2f4> (11:30 minutes)

Mark Griffin explores the multiple difficulties involved in trying to provide a school in rural Tanzania with a safe and reliable water supply.

Karibu Sana, this is Mark Griffin of the International Environment Forum (IEF) and I am a facilities engineer and a Water and Sanitation practitioner. To illustrate some examples that apply to Sustainable Development Goal six for Water, Sanitation, and Freshwater Ecosystems, I want to share with you a field trip I made to the Ruaha Secondary School [1] in Tanzania, the site of an SED project aimed at educating girls. I was invited in 1996 to review the water supply situation there, which led to a general survey of the surrounding area, and which provides some examples of SDG-6 water targets.

The first example is one of equitable access: The school and surrounding agricultural areas are located in the village of Kibabwe next to a tributary of the Great Ruaha River. On the other side of the river is "Iringa Town" or the Municipality of Iringa, in the Iringa Region of Tanzania. The village side of the river was rich in drinking water supply because of a natural spring or Artesian Well that supplied ground water of good quality with low bacterial counts. However, the Municipality used this spring as its main water source by capturing it and conveying it to Iringa Town across the river, a practice which is common in water resources management. The school and village people of Kibabwe in turn received water from the municipality through a smaller pipe that crossed the river a second time. Kibabwe's water supply would often be interrupted for several months each year because the smaller pipe broke during the wet

season when the river was high and fast, so the primary reason for my being invited was to find a secondary source of pumped water during these outage months, despite that the best source of water was already present but diverted to the municipality. A second piped supply came by way of a distribution pipe alongside the road, but it was not large enough to supply both the school and Kibabwe, and the water was pumped only intermittently. Additionally the farmers of Kibabwe no longer had irrigation access to the naturally flowing waters of the Artesian wellspring. As the area is water stressed during parts of the year, one would occasionally find holes drilled or burned into the large water pipe which leaked into the gardens as makeshift irrigation, and the pipe would promptly be repaired by the municipality. One would glean that the farmers felt they had a previous right to the water for irrigation.

So far I've described a water distribution problem that presumes water quantity is not an issue, but water stress in the Iringa Region has increased since my visit there 20 years ago. Large commercial rice farms, small subsistence farmers, hydropower, and local ecosystems are in competition for water, and for the first time in 1993 the Ruha River had sections with no flow for several months. [2, 3, 4] Note the level of water in these photos of the hydroelectric dam at Mtera. The first one shows the reservoir at or near capacity while the second shows it nearly empty.[5] These examples all concern equitable access to water for

people and for the economy, but they also demonstrate the need to leave enough water for ecosystems and wildlife, one of the targets of SDG-6. It also has implications for transboundary coordination and for providing renewable energy, a topic of SDG-7.

The second example is one of water quality: The school facility was equipped with underground septic tanks and leech fields, normally adequate except when the river swelled and the local groundwater and surface water became contaminated. While the wet season provides a seasonal abundance of water quantity, at the same time it exacerbates a fecal contamination problem with shallow latrines and open field defecation. In addition to pathogenic contamination, local industries dumped untreated chemicals into the river. In one case which demonstrates simultaneous biological and chemical contamination, there was open dumping from an upstream prison facility, followed by a pressure treated wood manufacturing process, and followed by raw water draw off for the municipal water system. So in this case the drinking water, even if boiled to kill pathogens, contained carcinogenic contaminants from chromium and arsenic in the process at that time to make pressure treated wood. This illustrates the need for simultaneous transboundary, inter-sector management, also known as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and one of the SDG-6 targets.

These photos show the location where water supply was drawn from the river, visibly seen as dark and murky with floating organic materials. The suspended clay and floating organic debris is not a problem in itself, except that the water being pumped to the top of the hill in Iringa Town was being treated with a form of chlorine as a disinfectant. The problem here, which serves as an example of technology transfer and education, is that chlorine mixed with organic materials creates precursors to carcinogenic contaminants. The typical industry standard is to first remove the organics with a physical coagulant process, followed by disinfection of pathogens with chlorine or similar. Regardless, disinfection today takes precedence over potential cancer in the future – unfortunately a choice to be made without the necessary coordinated efforts to provide sustained quality of drinking water.

A coordinated effort near the Ruaha Secondary School and Iringa Town is necessary and beneficial on a local level, but the scale of IWRM needs to be much larger. In this case a management plan might address the Great Ruaha River basin that covers the Iringa and Dodoma Regions of Tanzania, and include the Ruaha National Park with its wildlife and ecosystems, the Mtera [6] and Kidatu Hydroelectric Dams, and the controversial commercial rice farms upstream of the Ruaha National Park. These topics are in addition to the usual irrigation, fishing, and WATSAN activities of local residents, and there is currently a struggle to decide which water uses take precedence for the overall good. This is also an opportunity for increased water efficiency, another target of SDG-6.

There were many examples of local cooperation: DANIDA was onsite and assisted with background information about local water use; the Iringa Water Department quality laboratory tested water samples I had taken in the area; the school staff was very helpful and loaned me a small motorcycle for transportation, and a student's family assisted with materials and manpower in exchange for my assistance in the design of the irrigation system at their farm.

Several important lessons learned during my visit remain. The first regards technology transfer and supply chains. I attempted to design and build a small western-style water treatment plant to produce water suitable for drinking without boiling it. All or most of the required materials were local, but some items would need to be shipped, in particular the coagulating and disinfecting chemicals. Once built, trained operators would need to maintain safe operations and maintenance of the plant. Whereas trained persons and the required supplies could not be guaranteed, I recommended that water continued to be boiled before drinking. However, when I reported this to the school staff they laughed at me because they knew the water had to be boiled – they just didn't want to carry it! So I had listened to what I thought the needs were and not the request they gave me. I didn't listen, and this was another lesson learned. Today I might go a step further and attempt a more formal consultation with representatives from area stakeholders, but my purview was somewhat restricted to the school with which there was ample consultation.

Although a modern treatment plant and elevated storage and distribution system was conceivable near the school, it was not practical. Energy was also an issue because electricity was very expensive, so running a treatment plant in that setting would have been cost-prohibitive. Also, I lived in the same quarters as the teachers who burned fuel indoors for cooking. I offered to get them electric cook stoves, but I learned that they couldn't even afford the electricity to run them – it was more than the capital cost of the equipment. This regards equitable access to energy, SDG-7. When I returned home I began studies of slow sand filtration that uses no chemicals and less energy for pumping, but uses more land area and is labor intensive, nonetheless more appropriate for this setting, again a matter of technology transfer.

As part of a facilities review I collaborated with the students and staff to create potential applications for renewable energy. The two most notable ideas were solar hot water bags placed on roofs, and small windmills that pumped water directly. To my knowledge these were not implemented, but today solar panels would be a likely choice. The students

typically cut the grass by hand, so I investigated buying a gasoline driven lawn mower, but the cost, including a hefty tariff, was prohibitive.

My stay in the village of Kibabwe in the suburbs of Iringa lasted a short eight weeks, but I learned many lessons and gained some close friends. Water-borne diseases were the main topic of my visit, but malaria was a harsh reality of living there and the medications available at that time restricted my visit to that duration unless I took other measures for a much longer stay. Just before I arrived the daughter of a couple who became close friends died from malaria, mainly due to a lack of resources. Perhaps mosquito control could be another consideration of Integrated water management, but I am unqualified to assess this adequately. The greatest personal outcome to me was that it demonstrated how we take water for granted in the west and how we consume it apparently without regard to the purification processes and energy requirements involved. This changed my career to focus on the sustainability of water resources from that time onward.

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3. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jan/15/great-ruaha-...>
4. <http://www.futureclimateafrica.org/news/blog-climate-dams-and-data-in-t...>
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6. <http://www.tanESCO.co.tz/index.php/mtera>

The challenges that a renewable energy matrix bring to the academic world (SDG 7)

by Rafael Shayani at <https://youtu.be/HfqyrHlhpzs>

Prof. Rafael Amaral Shayani, Universidade de Brasília, Departamento de Engenharia Elétrica, Laboratório de Fontes Renováveis de Energia, discusses the need for broader education for energy planners.

The energy issue has been a formidable challenge for humanity. The world's energy consumption grows year after year, based on fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas). Renewable energy sources (solar, wind, etc.), despite hitting records of growth, still correspond to a very small fraction of the energy matrix. As a result, the energy sector increases its greenhouse gas emissions, contributing more and more to global warming, in contradiction to all global efforts in pursuit of sustainable development.

The energy sector is extremely conservative. There is a deep-rooted idea that energy security is the main point to be pursued, and that only fossil fuels are capable of ensuring this security, since many of

the renewable sources are intermittent and therefore unable to provide reliable energy.

The Paris Accord, however, presents a different way of doing energy planning. It recognizes the importance of integrated, holistic and balanced non-market approaches, and also that the fight against climate change must respect, promote and consider the respective human rights obligations, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, people with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, the right to development, as well as gender equality, women's empowerment and intergenerational equality.

This is a completely different way of doing energy planning! Such a change of approach requires that the Energy theme be treated in an interdisciplinary way. It is no longer sufficient that the matter be treated only from a technical engineering point of view, for example. Human and social issues should be studied by students interested in Energy. The following questions should be discussed in universities, providing important elements for students, who will become future professionals qualified to deal with this complex subject, to take decisions with a broader and more complete view of the subject: What is the relation between Energy and Environment? Energy and Social Justice? Energy and Public Health? Energy and Human Rights? Energy and Poverty Eradication? Energy and World Citizenship? Energy and World Peace? The focus of energy studies must cease to be technologies and become the human being.

Students should be able to analyze the technical, social and environmental impacts of certain technologies and their respective costs. We can no longer consider the implications related to the emission of greenhouse gases from fossil fuels as externalities; they should be considered in the costs and influence the decision to adopt them or not!

Another important point is to make students reflect on the energy issue with its global implications. Students should draw inspiration from the words of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) that "the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" and "let your vision be world-embracing rather than confined to your own self " by considering energy solutions that promote social justice and direct humanity toward world peace. It is up to teachers to change their teaching method, deepening human and social issues in engineering courses, to train the new professionals of the 21st century with a broader and more comprehensive view than before.

Responsible consumption and production (SDG12)

by Arthur Dahl at <https://youtu.be/i8TQh-ZZovs>

Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum, who has worked for half a century on sustainability issues, explores the deeper meaning of our consumption and production behaviour.

The goal to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns touches on both sides of the economic process producing goods and services to support human well-being, both of which are today highly unsustainable, with the rape and pillage of the planet's resources to respond to short-term demands. Driven by the wrong indicators like GDP that simply measure the flow of money through the economy without judging the purpose of those flows or their contribution to human well-being, we have structured the economy around governments dominated by economic thinking and private enterprises driven by the profit motive. The economy has globalized while government regulation remains largely national, and with a natural tendency toward monopoly positions with an increasing concentration of power and wealth, giant multinationals are more influential today than most governments and there is no global institution capable of regulating them in the common interest.

The result is a circular diseconomy with enormous sums spent on advertising to cultivate desires in passive consumers for goods of marginal utility, if not actually damaging to health and well-being, produced with as little labour as possible to expand profit margins and planned obsolescence to keep consumers coming back for more. The natural and social capital required to produce these goods are

treated as externalities and not included in corporate profit and loss statements or national accounts, hiding the fact that we are living far beyond our means, while economic, social and environmental debts accumulate for future generations to bear. Businesses claim that they are simply responding to consumer demand, when in fact they work hard to create that demand and steer it in the most profitable directions.

Among the consequences are our failure to respond adequately to climate change because of the vested interests in the production and consumption of fossil fuels. The alarming recent signs of the collapse of biodiversity and a human caused planetary extinction event are largely due to multinational agroindustries and chemical manufacturers pushing intensive large-scale farming methods dependent on the widespread use of chemical fertilizers and toxic chemicals, all with the primary purpose of increasing corporate profits. There is no global mechanism to regulate damaging production processes or to defend planetary carrying capacity. While there are many responsible producers and innovators showing that sustainable production is possible, they carry little weight in the present unsustainable production system.

Consumption

Ultimately it is each of us as a consumer that decides what to buy and how to consume it, at least within the choices presented to us, or to decide not to buy at all beyond basic necessities. For the poor, there is often no choice, just consuming whatever is available. Responsible living becomes an ethical challenge, especially when bombarded with messages and surrounded by social pressures, designed with great sophistication to push us into buying. New technologies have only amplified the problem, both with an ever-expanding range of products and with new media connecting us constantly with those aiming to manipulate us in multiple ways.

More research is needed in the social sciences to understand how we so easily fall prey to this psychological manipulation. For example, the impacts of the spread and consumption of IT products and networks need to be studied, both to improve their use to empower the poor and provide everyone with access to knowledge and science, and also to understand the dangers of overconsumption, the cultivation of addictions to social media, impacts of children's use of technology on their education and the development of young minds, and the dangers of their use to manipulate the public in everything from consumption patterns to elections. The extensive research in marketing and product design to increase consumption is not presently balanced with research to reduce excessive consumption. There are behavioural barriers, mindsets, confirmation biases and ideologies that are resistant to fact-based information. Alongside a reorientation to more durable and recyclable products, a major new effort is needed on how to motivate simpler, less material lifestyles, being content with little, and turning in other directions once basic needs are met. Researchers in the social sciences need to partner with those dealing with the ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions of human purpose where some of the answers may be found.

The ephemeral pleasure of the materialistic consumer society, where status is measured by consumption and greed is admired, needs to give way to the satisfaction of leading a virtuous life. Young people can be vaccinated against consumerism if they learn early the pleasure of altruistic acts of service to their community. If each of us learns to be content with little, there will be

enough for everyone. As Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, as put it "Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them."

On the production side, the necessary fundamental transition will challenge the economic sciences to design alternative economies that are socially just, altruistic and cooperative, create employment, and reduce poverty and inequality, as called for in the Sustainable Development Goals.

While business is a legitimate partner in implementing the SDGs, attention is needed to both the danger and the potential consequences of businesses "taking over" sustainable development, becoming the dominant partners to make it a profit-making enterprise for the very few. "Greening" products is necessary, but is not the core of sustainable development. More fundamental change is often needed in directions that will not be attractive to business. For example, it is important to encourage products and technologies that people and communities can master themselves, and not only those that are profitable in a business context.

Obviously, the economic transition would have to be planned carefully. Major parts of the economy are engaged in production that does not contribute to sustainability or human well-being. Major investments must be written off, capital will need to be reoriented, and new forms of employment created for all those whose jobs will be lost during the transition. Fundamental change is always painful for many, and their needs have to be taken into consideration.

In a larger perspective, as the Bahá'í International Community has put it, "Sustainable production is not simply about 'greener' technology but rather, should involve systems that enable all human beings to contribute to the productive process. In such a system, all are producers, and all have the opportunity to earn (or receive, if unable to earn) enough to meet their needs.

The concept of justice is embodied in the recognition that the interests of the individual and of the wider community are inextricably linked....

Ultimately, the transformation required to shift towards sustainable consumption and production will entail no less than an organic change in the

structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body—as well

as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it." (BIC 2010)

How can we reduce excessive consumption? SDG12

by Christine Muller <https://youtu.be/dM4bxwJ66sc>

Christine Muller of the International Environment Forum helps us to address the challenge of reducing our excessive consumption.

SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, calls for a reduction of our ecological footprint by changing the way we produce and consume goods and resources. It includes ambitious goal targets to be achieved by 2030. Developed countries will need to take the lead in moving toward sustainable consumption and production. The challenges are formidable: Agricultural methods and industrial production must become more sustainable; waste must be significantly reduced, recycled, and reused. And most important is the cutting back on excessive consumption.

At the same time, too many people today are not even able to meet their basic needs. They need to be supported in sustainable development and should have the right to their fair share of the Earth's resources.

This makes the reduction of consumption by the wealthier people of the world all the more important. With wealthy people I mean most people who are living in developed countries as well as the well-to-do and middle class in the developing world.

The challenge is huge, because present generations have grown up in a culture of consumerism. They have not experienced any other way of life. People take consumer goods for granted and feel entitled to possess them.

Despite their ability to enjoy material goods on a scale and quality that is unprecedented in human history, many people are not happy, and a mental health crisis is in progress with increasing numbers of people afflicted by depression and addictions with some of them becoming prone to suicide and acts of violence. Studies have shown that, once basic needs are met, more material goods don't enhance happiness. Materialism and consumerism do not fulfill the real needs of people and destroy the Earth's life support-systems endangering even human survival.

All the world's religions warn us about greed, for example Taoism teaches "*There is no greater*

calamity than indulging in greed." ¹ And Islam admonishes "*O children of Adam, ... eat and drink, but be not extravagant. Indeed, He likes not those who commit extravagance.*" ² Now, I don't mean that we should go to the other extreme, to asceticism. We can enjoy the beautiful things this world offers us, even as we significantly reduce our consumption.

All of this means that we need to rethink the purpose of our lives considering that humans are spiritual beings. If we don't nourish our souls, we will stay hungry, even if we fill our lives with material things. The Baha'i teachings say that "*the world is but a show, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it....the world is like the vapor in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion.*"³

Merely asking people to drastically reduce their consumption would likely be useless. Their emptiness must first be filled with the real water of life, with meaning and a sense of belonging. A deeper understanding of their purpose in life will provide the foundation for a substantial reduction in consumption. It will then no longer be needed, and people will be much more open to face the reality of the environmental crisis and to live a more simple life that is environmentally sustainable.

The worship of the golden calf of materialism and of the myth of unlimited economic growth can be replaced with connecting ourselves to our spiritual essence and to our Creator. The word religion comes from the latin word religare – reconnect - and we should not be hung up by its aberrations.

The Torah teaches "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" ⁴ And Jesus said "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*" ⁵ The love for God and for all of His creation makes us care about all the people who are exploited in the current economic system, and care for all other creatures

of this Earth that are suffering or even become extinct because of habitat loss, pollution, and a changing climate. Such love creates purpose in our life and a sense of belonging.

All people are created as noble beings and deserve equal rights. At the same time, each individual shares some responsibility for the well-being of society. The Baha'i teachings say that people find happiness in the promotion of "*the best interests of the peoples .. of the earth.*" ⁶ Baha'u'llah said "*Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.*" ⁷ Such an altruistic attitude that comes from deep within an individual is the key to that individual's happiness as well as a prerequisite for the large-scale changes needed toward a sustainable civilization.

Imagine a society that cares about the welfare of each individual, and where individuals are eager to contribute to the common good. Serving together to make the world a better place makes people truly happy. It provides their life with a profound purpose

and with a sense of belonging to a meaningful social circle. There are many areas of social needs where we can make a difference instead of wasting our time, minds, and hearts in the pursuit of senseless shopping.

The tricky question is how to get there. Over the past couple of decades, the global Baha'i community has experimented with a model of social transformation that seems to work. Communities empower themselves with study classes that provide spiritual nourishment, ethical values, as well as skills and experience for practical service to the community. This model has been used with adults, youth, and children in almost all the countries of the world. These educational efforts could be expanded and replicated. They have already shown that they work and hold great promise for the future, because they build the foundation for social transformation. People will no longer have the need for excessive consumption, because they are fulfilled with a meaningful life.

SOURCES

1 Tao Teh Ching <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/2002/07/greed-the-mother-of-all-sins.as...>

2 Quran, 7:31

3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII

4 Deuteronomy 6:5

5 Mark 12:31

6 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 250

7 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 94

Sustainable forestry in DR Congo SDG15

by John Kendall <https://youtu.be/LWsGfOlpxY> (13 minutes)

In this 13 minute video, Canadian forester John Kendall makes the case that a high level of community transformation is necessary for REDD+ (forest management for carbon sequestration) to deliver on climate change and SDG 15 objectives. He uses his Mai Ndombe REDD+ project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a case study in community engagement, with efforts to involve all parts of the community and to create consciousness that communities that are united can take charge of their own destiny. Agroforestry and similar approaches that produce rapid positive results encourage longer term planning to move away from shifting cultivation and achieve sustainability. Similar results with Congolese Baha'i social and economic development activities demonstrate that this strategy is both an essential platform and something that can be successfully facilitated with right approach.

Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (SDG15)

by Laurent Mesbah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz4VCM97bjl> (16:43 minutes)

Professor Laurent Mesbah of the American University in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, explores our scientific and aesthetic ties with nature, and the lessons we learn from the rich biodiversity of the natural world. The present paradigm of growth has reached planetary limits and is destroying the biodiversity on which we depend for so many resources. He considers more sustainable uses of resources, with the efforts that are needed at all levels from global to local. Education is an important part of this, using nature to education children and build their capacities and potentials for cooperation. He gives the example of the Bloom School in

Sarajevo that involves students at all levels in gardening, work in the forest, and other activities to get close to nature and learn the values from nature that are also needed in human society.

Science, Technology and the Human Spirit, Triglav Circle

Chateau de Poussignol, France, 29 June-1 July 2018

by Arthur Dahl

The Triglav Circle (<http://www.triglavcircleonline.org/>) was founded in 1996 after the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen to discuss the spiritual and ethical dimensions of public policies. Today it seeks to enrich the public discourse on global problems, encouraging political concern, social engagement and cultural sensitivity. It held its 2018 meeting at the Chateau de Poussignol in the Nièvre Department of central France ([report with a few pictures](#)). A small but high level group from different fields spent a day and a half discussing the theme "Science, Technology and the Human Spirit". A report on last year's meeting, also at Poussignol, is at <https://iefworld.org/node/885>, with more pictures of the chateau and the region at <http://www.yabaha.net/dahl/travel/t2017/Nievre/Triglav.html>.

Participants included the founders of the Triglav Circle, Jacques Baudot (former senior UN official and coordinator of the 1995 Copenhagen Social Summit) and Barbara Baudot; Konrad Raiser, the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and his wife Elisabeth; Geneviève Jacques, retiring president of CIMADE, a French association to help foreigners in difficulty; Marie-Aimée Latournerie, jurist and member of the French Council of State, author of a report on social inequality; Kishore Mandhyan, former Political Director for peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights affairs at the United Nations; Simone Rignault, with a long political career as a Deputy, Regional Councillor and Mayor in France; and several others.

I prepared a paper for the meeting, "*Reflections on Science, Technology and the Human Spirit*," that provided the background for many of my contributions, and will eventually be published on the Triglav Circle web site. It can be seen at <https://iefworld.org/node/930>.

The meeting started with viewing a video documentary on the life of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912-2007) made and presented by

his daughter Elisabeth Raiser. His early fearful memories of the First World War, and efforts to find a reflection of God in the stars, and later in the laws of physics after meeting Werner Heisenberg when he was 14, led him to fundamental discoveries in quantum physics, nuclear fusion and planetary formation in the early Solar System. He was then drawn into the efforts in Germany under the Third Reich to understand if a nuclear bomb was practical, before succeeding in convincing the government that it would take years to develop and that they should drop the idea. The moral dilemma this represented between his theoretical research and its applications, and failed efforts with Heisenberg to convince the Americans through Neils Bohr also to drop research on nuclear weapons, showed him the limits that scientists had over the use of their own discoveries and led him to take strong anti-nuclear positions and warn of environmental degradation after the war. The video was a powerful evocation of the ethical challenges presented by science and technology.

Situation of scientists in today's world

The discussion then revolved around the situation of scientists in today's world. Scientific discoveries are accelerating change, but we do not foresee the consequences. Researchers often do not consider the ethics of their own work in science and technology. For example, what are the implications of Artificial Intelligence for human society? In science, there is no sense of humility before something that is greater than we are.

The paradigm in the natural sciences has been their objectivity, and they have not addressed ethical considerations, while the social sciences explore relationships within communities involving ethical concerns. However, as science becomes more collaborative, these distinctions are diminishing, as illustrated by the recent merger of the International Council for Science and the International Social Science Council into a single global body for all of the sciences. The mechanistic Cartesian view of science is also challenged by quantum theory.

Today, many scientists find themselves in authoritarian structures or large corporations where they have little choice of the subjects they work on or the uses that are made of their discoveries. The scientific landscape has changed, with “pure” science in retreat, and financial patronage becoming all-important. Whose money is invested? For whose agenda? Whose intellectual property? Who owns the applications? The public character of scientific knowledge, with science seen as a public good, is increasingly replaced by corporate research protected as intellectual property. Artificial intelligence is being pursued for corporate profit, but where are reflections on its impacts taking place? The growing proportion of private funding for science is not looking after the public interest, or whether its uses are good or bad.

The legitimacy and integrity of science are today under threat. There is growing scepticism of elite knowledge and the scientists’ “agenda”, with science discredited as representing special interests. People see science leading to long-term destructive effects on the environment and the lack of sustainability. The concept of the environment itself separates humanity from nature, and the conservation movement separates nature from us, with only the ecologists still seeing a whole. The European Enlightenment has misled us into patterns of thinking that need to be replaced by a new more holistic enlightenment. Support for the social sciences is being cut in many countries for political reasons because they raise too many questions. We may be entering a new dark age.

Technologies and transcendental ideals

A second theme was on technological “progress” and transcendental ideals. Technologies give us new liberties, but they are also a leveller of culture and philosophies. It can be hard to find transcendent ideals. Political groups may practice meditation without it leading to good character. Some technologies oblige you to pursue goals you

do not want, driven by commercial interests, or by hidden or overt purposes and goals. There are also differences in transcendent goals across different groups. Technology is now another tool to exclude people from access to their rights, as when migrants must make applications on line but do not have access to the Internet. In discussing the Sustainable Development Goals, should people have a right to technologies, or do we need a way to limit technologies? Transcendent ideals include human dignity and social justice. How do you get to justice without love and concern for others? Individual freedom is too often linked to neoliberal competition. The French ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity need to be taken together. These ideals need to be strengthened against the new totalitarianisms and forms of power that can come with technologies.

Another discussion revolved around sources of knowledge. Science is one obvious source, but what about spiritual insights, beyond seeing, experiencing and feeling? Nature is more than the natural sciences. Knowledge can also come from the humanities if they are not diminished by reductionist language. The German term *Wahrnehmung* (perception) literally means to take in the truth, a form of knowledge beyond investigation, close to insight or intuition, seeing and receiving the truth with an inner cohesion and wholeness that has no English equivalent. This led to a discussion of religion as a second knowledge system complementary to science, touching on justice, peace and the integrity of the creation. Religion is the most elementary form of *Wahrnehmung*, an encounter with the whole. All religions point to this experience as the source of life and being, and give it shape to communicate it through symbols and rituals. The sequence of religious revelations build on this experience, until they become exclusive and competitive. What we need today is to build a new culture of values instead of valuing culture.

Reflections on Science, Technology and the Human Spirit

Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum, Geneva, Switzerland

Paper prepared for the **Triglav Circle 2018**, Chateau de Poussignol, Blismes, France

30 June-1 July 2018 <http://www.triglavcircleonline.org/>

Too often in our world, science and religion are seen as in conflict, if not contradictory. As a Baha’i, I have never had that problem, and chose a career in science because it seemed to be the best expression of my spirituality. These reflections

emerge from this experience of science in harmony with the human spirit.

First, it may help to explore what we mean by the human spirit. It is obvious that we have a physical

reality, with a body subject to the constraints of any animal. Science is itself a proof of our rational or intellectual reality, which distinguishes us from all other animals. There might be more controversy in the scientific community about whether we have a spiritual reality, yet some form of spiritual experience is so widespread that it is hard to deny that there must be something behind it. Here I am assuming the acceptance of this spiritual reality.

Once we admit the existence of a spiritual reality that we all possess in embryonic form and that must be developed, this comes to justify our higher human purpose, to cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness. There is, in fact, an essential connection between the outer and inner dimensions of our existence.

"We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions." 1

I have been fortunate that my own spiritual tradition has from the beginning had great praise for science. Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

"Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world.... In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him." 2

and again

"The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth." 3

The son of the founder of the Baha'i Faith, 'Abdu'l-Baha, similarly wrote:

[Humans are] "the highest specialized organism of visible creation, embodying the qualities of the mineral, vegetable and animal plus an ideal endowment absolutely minus and absent in the lower kingdoms - the power of intellectual investigation into the mysteries of outer phenomena. The outcome of this intellectual endowment is science which is especially characteristic of man. This scientific power investigates and apprehends created objects and the laws surrounding them. It is the discoverer of the hidden and mysterious secrets of the material universe and is peculiar to man alone. The most noble and praiseworthy accomplishment of man therefore is scientific knowledge and attainment." 4

We see Science and Religion as two complementary knowledge systems, both of which are necessary to guide civilization forward:

- science without religion falls into materialism;
- religion without science tends to superstition and fanaticism.

Unfortunately, both these excesses are common in the world today, and are behind many of our difficulties and crises.

The problem is that science and technology are neutral, their discoveries can be used for good or evil. It is religion, broadly defined to encompass all spiritual traditions, that provides the ethical framework and moral purpose for science and technology.

It is in this framework that we can explore some of the dichotomies that science and technology present to us today, and to consider how the human spirit can best profit from the wonderful tools that science has given us.

Technology can liberate or imprison

As physical beings, we have all sorts of practical limitations, which dominated our potential for most of the existence of the human species. Life was largely devoted to meeting our physical needs and avoiding life-threatening situations. Now we can dive under the sea, go to the moon, fly faster than the speed of sound or go anywhere on the planet, speak to anyone around the world, record our thoughts and experiences, and manipulate our environment as we wish. It would seem that our

liberties have no limits, and the consumer society is there to cater to our every want. And that is the paradox. We have trapped ourselves in our consumer culture, forced to keep upgrading our technologies to avoid falling behind. Our home is our castle, protecting us from unwanted encounters and our motor vehicles are similarly designed to protect us from other people. We have become prisoners to our technologies. Rather than liberating us from the struggle for existence so that we can devote our energies to more important things of the spirit, we surround ourselves with distractions so that we do not have to face the spiritual void within ourselves.

Technology can unite or divide

Now that it is technically possible to encounter and exchange with every other human being on the planet, we can for the first time experience and profit from the unity of the entire human race. The rich diversity of human experience is available at our fingertips, not only as it is at present, but as it has been documented down through history. We have access to all the holy books, all the discoveries of science, all the literary, artistic and musical masterpieces from every culture, all the richness of human experience. We can converse, exchange pictures, interact and collaborate as never before in history. This is the perfect foundation for us to live together in peace and harmony. Yet the technology also seems to bring out all that is worst in human nature. We spread fear and hate of others, manipulate public opinion with “alternative truths” and false news, bully and intimidate, slander and corrupt, and find wonderful new outlets for criminal activity. Humanity today seems ever more fragmented and divided in our technologically united world.

Technology for independence or dependence

Science and technology have not yet freed us from all human limitations. We still can fall ill, have accidents, and must someday grow old and die, although perhaps with modern medical science much better than before. Still, the choices before us at any point in our lives are greater than ever. We are even independent of day and night, although we have to sleep at some point. Most technologies are now so portable that we can take them with us everywhere, and be in contact when and where we want. Yet the result seems more often than not to trap us and make us dependent. At least in the more developed parts of the world, the new technologies have led to new kinds of dependence.

Everyone seems more preoccupied with their smartphone than their immediate surroundings or the people around them. The World Health Organization has declared video and on-line game dependence as a mental illness. Professional life often requires being constantly available wherever and whenever the work requires it. Social media are designed to trigger the same pleasure centres as cocaine. Technology is the new opiate of the people.

Technology for profit rather than service

Most technological innovation today is carried out by the private sector driven largely by the search for profits. In today’s materialistic economy, profitability is the driving force for a company, rather than just one measure of efficiency among others. It has become the end justifying any means. There are counter currents, such as in the open source software movement, but success is still largely judged by the accumulation of individual and corporate wealth. The result is a distortion of the aims of science and technology. Rather than making discoveries and inventions that will be of service to humanity, the pressure is to focus on those that will bring the most profit. This either means those that will appeal to the rich, who can afford to pay for them, or those that attract the most advertising revenue. This then leads to data profiling, reinforcing confirmation bias, and other manipulations to target consumers with the ads to which they will be most susceptible. There is little or no interest in technologies that will be of service to the poor and will empower them to self-improvement, with the exception perhaps of the rapid spread of cellphones and phone-mediated payment systems and banking services which are transforming the lives of many poor around the world.

The privatization of scientific information using technology

One perverse result of the revolution in information technologies is the privatization of knowledge, including scientific information. The system of intellectual property rights has been steadily reinforced to protect and increase corporate profits. Much of this has focused on the entertainment industry, but it has now extended to the privatization of scientific knowledge. A few multinational scientific publishing houses have bought up the most important scientific journals, including rights to all the back issues. These have been put on line for a price. Researchers in

universities or scientific institutions have libraries prepared to pay for institutional subscriptions, but otherwise articles can only be read for a high fee. For researchers in poor countries, or those without an institutional affiliation, or retired, the scientific literature is available on line but beyond reach. This is science by and for the rich, excluding most of the world from accessing or participating in the latest scientific advances.

An ethical approach to science

If we return to our higher human purpose to develop the potential in human consciousness and to be of service to an ever-advancing civilization, then we must turn the motivations for and uses of science and technology to these purposes. A scientific knowledge of the integrated nature of the biosphere, our place in it and our responsibility for it, needs to be coupled with an ethical or spiritual motivation to change our behaviour accordingly. As the Bahá'í International Community has put it:

“Recognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has the responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, does not represent an influence which can by itself establish in the consciousness of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in understanding that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it.” 5

Our approach to science and technology needs to change in fundamental ways as part of the general transformation needed in society and called for in the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. For example, science for the common good should be funded as we would fund other common benefits, with public support and philanthropy. Where discoveries are profitable, there should be mechanisms to direct at least a share of those profits back into the scientific enterprise.

Also, science should be accessible to everyone, and everyone should be empowered to contribute to scientific advancement. While there is a role for

the highly trained scientist and elaborate scientific instruments at the cutting edge of research, science should not be restricted to an elite. Indigenous peoples have deep wisdom about their environments accumulated over many generations of careful observations. This is also science, although perhaps understood in a different intellectual framework. Everyone can learn to observe the world around them, and to think rationally in terms of cause and effect, while exploring, inventing and experimenting with solutions to their local problems. This is also a way to cultivate the potential in the human spirit of each person.

If we are to survive these turbulent times, where our technology is impacting the planet with everything from plastics to greenhouse gases produced from fossil fuels, and science is warning us to make rapid and fundamental changes before it is too late, we must draw on both our science and the powers of the human spirit to save us from ourselves. To the extent that we succeed in this, it will contribute to our spiritual as well as material advancement.

“As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development - both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a prerequisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival.” 6

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World Conference on Religions, Creeds and Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 June 2018

On 25 June 2018 the International Environment Forum participated in the **World Conference on Religions, Creeds and Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights**, held at the United Nations Palais des Nations under the patronage of H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who gave the opening keynote, along with a message from the UN Secretary-General. It was organized by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, and co-sponsored by the Arab Thought Forum, Bridges to Common Ground, the European Centre for Peace and Development, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the World Council of Churches, the World Council of Religious Leaders, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). The 34 speakers and panelists included high level representatives of Islam, the Catholic and Protestant churches, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and interfaith movements, as well as former ministers, ambassadors, heads of UN agencies, academics and theologians, and several Special Rapporteurs on human rights.

In his inaugural address, H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal asked if this was a make-or-break moment, with a gold curtain separating rich and poor, and an insecurity council unable to address weapons that destabilise the world. He described the global hunger for human dignity, and the need to speak out against injustice, calling for a social global Marshall Plan. We should empower and enable international citizenship to wage peace, which is less expensive than war, for our mutually assured survival. Only fearlessness is adequate for our time. He hoped that the Global Compacts for Migration and for Refugees would be agreed by the end of 2018. To support the 2030 Agenda, we need a moral lobby for equal citizenship rights, appreciating our diversity.

There were then eight keynotes on religious perspectives which shared common themes of the

need for dialogue among religions to stand up for our shared humanity and nurture equality in schools, jobs and places of worship. Today the religious and secular worlds are separated by a huge gap, with religion seen as part of the problem. Extremism and fanaticism kill religion, and religious leaders must speak out against the instrumentalization of religion for division. Religions should serve as a bridge over differences, since they share one common origin, thus ensuring religious freedom for all.

A first panel focused on the concept of equal citizenship and points of convergence between religions, with reference to an extensive working document prepared by the organizers. Religions agree on almost all points, with only 10% of theological differences. Humanity is a single family, and we have responsibilities towards each other and the world. Several panelists referred to shared positions on human rights, and on the needs of refugees and migrants.

A second panel considered equal citizenship rights for vulnerable, disadvantaged and discriminated social segments, looking at case studies of gender, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and indigenous people. It highlighted citizenship as a moral concept, and the need to educate for citizenship and participation in decision-making. Still today, there are movements using fear of minorities, xenophobia, chauvinistic nationalism and toxic rhetoric, reinforced by hate speech in social media. More than three quarters of stateless people are minorities. The UN only began to engage with religion in 2010, with an Interagency Task Force on Religion. The 2006 Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities has changed the approach from medical (protected patients) to social, opening the way for the disabled to be integrated into society.

The third panel explored issues with migrants, refugees, and internally-displaced persons. People

move to escape violence, persecution, or poverty and lack of opportunities, and suffer from the breakdown in education, health, shelter, security and land rights. Neoliberal policies are not based on the dignity of human beings and protection of the environment, leaving far too many behind, and creating a growing disconnect with the economic and social elite. Faith movements have a responsibility to move forward on this issue, becoming a driving force for a sustainable world order. There is a new level of dynamism at the inter-religious level based on shared principles and values, but there is still too little sharing of knowledge and working together among faiths. We need spiritual values and a moral compass to address this issue. All displaced persons have human rights, and a lack of citizenship undermines their human potential. Many displacements can drag on for years, and will increasingly become permanent, for example from small island developing states. Present arrangements to deal with this are insufficient. IEF President Arthur Dahl was one of the panelists, with a paper on Religion and Migration. A short report is at <http://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-arthur-dahl-migrants-are-denied-mo...>, and the paper is available at <https://iefworld.org/node/929>.

The final panel was on moving towards a new paradigm. It noted some of the disconnects in religious sentiments, with the problem not in beliefs but in divisive belonging becoming tribal and rejecting others. There is a wide gap between legal equality and equality before God. A new paradigm is obviously needed. We must give people the right to hope. Finding relevant texts in the Holy Books can counteract fear from religious bias, and provide resources to respect the others. God is testing us by what he has revealed to us. We should compete with each other in doing good deeds. Large majorities want reduced military expenditures and more on social needs, but all countries do the reverse. It was pointed out that the youth are absent from the conference, but they will inherit the world. Equal citizenship can be a gateway to global citizenship and peace.

A declaration was signed at the end of the conference (see extract below), and the proceedings and papers will eventually be published ([report with pictures](#)).

The Declaration signed at the end of the conference includes the following **Ten-Point Global Strategic Plan**

1. To unite in a common endeavor of religious and lay institutions, and their respective leaders, to harness the collective energy of all religions, creeds and value-systems to uphold equal citizenship rights, to reject the instrumentalization of religions, to promote their authentic meanings and universal values, and finally to advocate openness and plurality of approach towards other faiths, creeds and value-systems; To move towards a world where the generalization of equal citizenship rights contributes to social and cultural diversity to be celebrated in resilient and inclusive societies thus preventing conflict among diverse sub-groups in society which gives rise to Islamophobia, Christianophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination;
2. To address the legitimate concerns relating to the connotation of “minorities” as allegedly exogenous groups when referring to segments of the population which are an integral part of a nation’s citizenry. Harmonious integration of all segments of the population in resilient and inclusive societies should be enhanced through effective achievement of equal citizenship rights making the re-grouping of citizens into denominational sub-identities superfluous as a political tool;
3. To enforce all rights and duties of people on the basis of their role as rightsholders of civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights. The promotion and safeguarding of equal citizenship rights should encompass the concept of entitlement and preclude a freezing of accumulated inequalities;
4. To preserve the diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious heritages of transit and host countries, while, at the same time, offering opportunities for integration to arriving refugees and migrants. The aim is to promote mutual contributions and respective resilience, thus avoiding forced assimilation of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, in line with the provisions set forth in Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to avoid proselytization;
5. To work towards the full realization of equal citizenship rights which will require not only vertical interaction between society and the State but also

horizontal interaction within society itself. To be successful, both forms of interaction will require, where necessary, to transform a culture of compliance into a culture of accountability based on answerability and enforcement. This initiative will involve local, national or regional initiatives for promoting spiritual convergence and commonality of social purpose. The implementation of equal citizenship rights will gradually weaken discrimination, whether gender-related or based on other specificities including inter alia disability, ethnic or religious origin, age bracket, access to employment, health care, or sharing of resources;

6. To guarantee respect for the equality of women and men, girls and boys, within families, local communities, and society at large, by integrating in all efforts the promotion and the implementation of equal citizenship rights. Gender discrimination with respect to citizenship rights is a salient issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. In many parts of the world there are States that deny female citizens equal rights with male citizens with regard to acquiring, changing and retaining their nationality, and to conferring nationality to non-national spouses or children. Religious traditions can and should play an important role in understanding and accompanying societal changes as they address progress toward recognizing equality between women and men and to prevent potential tensions between such evolving social mores and traditional teachings and practices;

7. To promote equal citizenship rights as a sustained objective, starting with its implementation at school level. Education about, through and for

equal citizenship rights can only be achieved by promoting a change in national policies, reviewing school development plans and developing inclusive classrooms and teaching methodologies. Decision-makers must acknowledge and embrace the idea that equal citizenship education is essential to promote peace, dialogue and social cohesion as well as to alleviate social tensions;

8. To encourage political and civil authorities to dialogue with spiritual leadership in order to assist in promoting inter-religious literacy and in applying ethical principles to the local context. Whether religion is central or either marginal or absent from public discourse in a given country, while at the same time being central to social components thereof, it is important to encourage the state authorities including those that identify as secular, to engage with the relevant religious traditions thus enlisting the collaboration and understanding of all to prevent potential social and/or religious tension or conflict;

9. To respect within and between all countries, whether there is a separation between State and faiths or not, the right to freedom of religion and ensure that public laws and policies are applied equitably through an inclusive approach to religious diversity and not through exclusion of their public and private expression, so as to comply with article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights;

10. To spread equal citizenship rights as the gateway to the concept of global citizenship, a gateway in other words, to world peace.

Migration and Religion

Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum, Geneva, Switzerland presented a paper at this conference in a panel on Equal Citizenship Rights And Vulnerable/Disadvantaged/Discriminated Segment: Case Study of Migrants, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

As we address the complex issue of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, it is important to place migration in its proper context. The human race has always migrated, from the first migrations out of Africa, to the gradual colonization of all the inhabited places on Earth, even to the most remote Pacific islands. The great religions, too, have always spread by migration. Moses led the migration of the Hebrew people out of Egypt.

Islam spread out of Arabia to Spain and Indonesia. National borders changed often in the past, and passports for travel are a very new phenomenon dating from only the last hundred years. Up until recently, great economies like that of America and Australia were largely built through the hard work of migrants, and even today, with many countries experiencing ageing populations and birthrates below replacement levels, their future will depend on migration. Migration therefore can be a positive phenomenon for receiving countries, even if it results from trauma for the migrants.

Two things have changed in recent years. A reaction against globalization, with the rise of nationalisms for political ends built on nativism and

xenophobia, coupled with the revival of ancient tendencies to racism, have led to increasing divisions and social fragmentation, if not violent rejection of those who are different, even in places where peaceful coexistence had long been the rule. The resulting negative view of migration is quite recent. The original tendency of religion to accept and appreciate every human soul regardless of the outside form has unfortunately also too often been turned into an additional reason for rejection and discrimination. Religious intolerance and persecution are today a leading cause of forced displacement by denying equal citizenship rights on religious grounds.

Second, the rapid growth of the human population pressing against planetary limits and globalized with the support of new technologies is stressing if not seriously eroding the carrying capacity of the planet. There is no place left to migrate to that is not already well occupied. Furthermore, our environmental impacts, first among them accelerating climate change, are going to displace hundreds of millions of people in the decades ahead, forced permanently from their homes by rising sea levels, increasing drought, agricultural failures, violent storms and other catastrophes. In these situations, it is always the poor who have the fewest options. These displacements do not fall under the criteria for refugees, since they have no hope of returning once the cause of the displacement is removed. The most extreme case is that of the Small Island Developing States on low atolls that risk losing their entire national territory, and thus not only their homes and occupations but their culture and national identity, becoming citizens without a state.

All of this is in addition to the migrations and displacements caused by social and political factors, from war and violence to terrorism, failed states, and persecution of minorities, covered by the present refugee conventions. We must anticipate greatly increased flows of migrants.

The contribution of religions

From the perspective of our religions, creeds and value systems, this inevitable rise in migrations raises a series of issues, and potential solutions that we can offer.

First, from my perspective as both a scientist and a Bahá'í, our Earth has become one country with all humanity as its citizens. Every human being is a

trust of the whole, to be treated with respect, dignity and solidarity. All forms of prejudice, whether racial, political, religious, of gender or other differences need to be abolished. Extremes of wealth and poverty have no place in a world where there is enough wealth to meet everyone's needs if distributed more equitably. An economic system therefore needs to be devised that is socially just, altruistic and cooperative, creates meaningful employment for all, and eliminates poverty, starting at the community level.

All this applies equally to migrants. In Paris in 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, talked about our duty of kindness and sympathy towards strangers:

“Let not conventionality cause you to seem cold and unsympathetic when you meet strange people from other countries. Do not look at them as though you suspected them of being evildoers, thieves and boors. You think it necessary to be very careful, not to expose yourselves to the risk of making acquaintance with such, possibly, undesirable people. I ask you not to think only of yourselves. Be kind to the strangers, whether come they from Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world. Help to make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render them any service; try to make their lives a little happier. In this way, even if, sometimes, what you at first suspected should be true, still go out of your way to be kind to them—this kindness will help them to become better.”

In all our religious traditions, we can find similar expressions of the values we should apply to the vulnerable, disadvantaged and discriminated groups in our society. The wonderful response of our faith traditions to climate change, as demonstrated by the [Pope's Encyclical Laudato Si'](#), the [Islamic Declaration on Climate Change](#), and similar initiatives from other faiths, shows what is possible. The migration crisis gives us the opportunity to take similar initiatives for those now being displaced on a massive scale, where the human dimension and dramatic suffering are even more obvious. We should be at the forefront of positive responses to this crisis.

Second, many human rights violations today are against migrants, and illegal migrants are often denied even the most fundamental human rights protections. The label “illegal” from the simple fact

of crossing a border withdraws their right to exist as human beings, and is thrown up as a barrier to defend a “national interest”. Even those who are legally in another country face discrimination. At the 2010 Human Rights Council Social Forum on Climate Change and Human Rights, the International Environment Forum raised the need to extend concern beyond those migrants who are victims of climate-induced violations of their human rights, to focus on the education of receiving communities. All the great religions have traditions of welcoming guests. The spiritual nature of human beings is the same regardless of race, colour or creed. Also, we are all, through our lifestyles, part of the cause of climate change and environmental degradation, and have a duty of solidarity to those who are its victims. By educating those in the communities receiving migrants to have sympathy for their plight and a sense of responsibility towards them, welcoming them and assisting in their settlement, many human rights violations could be avoided. Faith-based organizations are well placed to take a lead in these efforts.

Third, since environmentally-induced migrations can be anticipated, they should be planned for and well organized, not waiting until a natural disaster or catastrophe forces the displacement in great misery and suffering. This also means determining where such migrants could best be settled where adequate resources are available, and perhaps with a situation and climate not too different from what they have known. Where whole communities are displaced, it should be possible for them to migrate as a unit, keeping families together and retaining as much as possible of their social capital. Globally, this could be a responsibility of an appropriate United Nations agency, but this should not stop our religious communities from assisting with positive responses at our own level.

Then there is the issue of assimilation or cultural preservation. Should migrants be forced to abandon their culture, traditions and faith and assimilate completely into the receiving community? Should they be allowed to cluster in their own in-group, maintaining their differences in a kind of cultural ghetto? Neither extreme is desirable. If the receiving community is welcoming and offers all the necessary opportunities for education, employment and participation, each migrant can choose the balance they feel comfortable with. Ideally they should see the culture and faith that they bring with them as

enriching the diversity in their new community, something to offer on equal terms as they also receive new perspectives from the community they have joined. Children can share the richness of multiple heritages, and young people, as they intermarry, will pass this human richness to their offspring. Learning diverse languages as infants has been shown to increase intelligence.

Finally, given what we now know about the changes coming in the world, not to mention other potential crises and catastrophes that past experience suggests could well be on the horizon, we could all find ourselves as migrants, refugees or displaced persons. The golden rule of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us certainly applies.