



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

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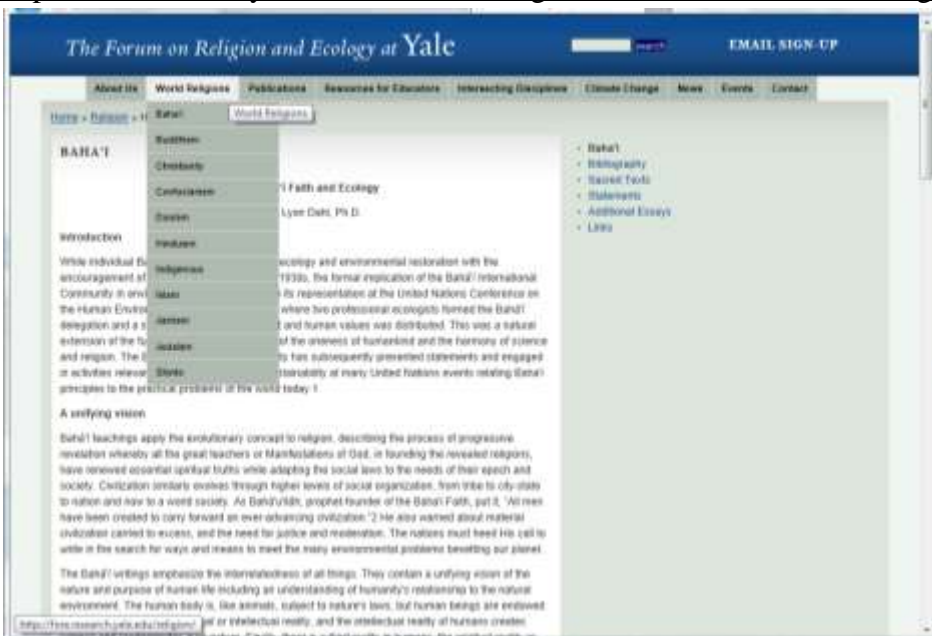
**From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters**

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](mailto: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.

**Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology Website Includes Bahá'í Faith**

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/>



We are delighted to announce that the Baha'i Faith was recently included among the world religions listed on the website of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. The inclusion of relevant Baha'i resources on the site was greatly facilitated by the IEF in cooperation with the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs.

The introduction written exclusively for the site by IEF president, Arthur Dahl, is included at the end of this newsletter.

## Videos showcase Baha'i approaches to sustainable development in USA



<http://publicaffairs.bahai.us/2014/04/17/series-of-short-videos-showcases-a-variety-of-bahai-approaches-to-sustainable-development/>

Through a series of short videos being released during the first half of 2014, the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs is highlighting ways in which the Baha'i community is fostering sustainable development at the local, national and international levels. The initiative is part of the US Baha'i effort to support the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which concludes this year.

Two of the videos were released in mid-January in support of Interfaith Power and Light's (IPL) annual Preach-in on Climate Change. One features Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, founder and president of IPL, addressing the spiritual dimensions of the climate issue. The other features Christine Muller, a Baha'i who serves on the board of Rhode Island IPL, in which she reflects on the importance of interfaith work on the climate crisis.

Two more videos are being released around the observance of Earth Day 2014. The first features the story of an eco-camp in Maryland started by a group of Baha'i youth who were inspired to start an outdoor program after completing a study circle on holding children's classes. The eco-camp has become an annual event that has attracted hundreds of children, junior youth (ages 11-14) and their families over the years and helped them to deepen their love of nature and their understanding of related Baha'i teachings.

The second Earth Week video features the Ranson (WV) Baha'i Center's engagement in a collaborative community garden project which not only makes nutritious produce available to those with limited budgets, but it has served as a catalyst to strengthen the social fabric of the community. As local Baha'i, Judith Ashelman says, "In these urban gardening initiatives that we're seeing blossoming around our country, a lot of people are discovering that it's more about people than gardening."

Four more videos will be released before the project is completed according to Peter Adriance, Representative for Sustainable Development in the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs. One will explore the concept of sustainable development. The others will showcase Baha'i efforts to advance sustainability at the national and international levels as well as through community building activities at the neighborhood level. "We hope that this series of short videos will help to convey some of the important learning that the Baha'i community has been doing on this topic and assist both the Baha'is and others to reflect not only on the practical but the spiritual aspects of sustainability," Adriance said.

Links to all videos in the series will be posted in the [Related Documents and Resources](#) page for sustainable development.

## U.S. National Climate Assessment

<http://www.globalchange.gov/>



**The National Climate Assessment summarizes the impacts of climate change on the United States, now and in the future. A team of more than 300 experts guided by a 60-member Federal Advisory Committee produced the report, which was extensively reviewed by the public and experts, including federal agencies and a panel of the National Academy of Sciences.**

Climate change, once considered an issue for a distant future, has moved firmly into the present.

Corn producers in Iowa, oyster growers in Washington State, and maple syrup producers in Vermont are all observing climate-related changes that are outside of recent experience. So, too, are coastal planners in Florida, water managers in the arid Southwest, city dwellers from Phoenix to New York, and Native Peoples on tribal lands from Louisiana to Alaska. This National Climate Assessment concludes that the evidence of human-induced climate change continues to strengthen and that impacts are increasing across the country.

Americans are noticing changes all around them. Summers are longer and hotter, and extended periods of unusual heat last longer than any living American has ever experienced. Winters are generally shorter and warmer. Rain comes in heavier downpours. People are seeing changes in the length and severity of seasonal allergies, the plant varieties that thrive in their gardens, and the kinds of birds they see in any particular month in their neighborhoods.

Other changes are even more dramatic. Residents of some coastal cities see their streets flood more regularly during storms and high tides. Inland cities near large rivers also experience more flooding, especially in the Midwest and Northeast. Insurance rates are rising in some vulnerable locations, and insurance is no longer available in others. Hotter and drier weather and earlier snow melt mean that wildfires in the West start earlier in the spring, last later into the fall, and burn more acreage. In Arctic Alaska, the summer sea ice that once protected the coasts has receded, and autumn storms now cause more erosion, threatening many communities with relocation.

Scientists who study climate change confirm that these observations are consistent with significant changes in Earth's climatic trends. Long-term, independent records from weather stations, satellites, ocean buoys, tide gauges, and many other data sources all confirm that our nation, like the rest of the world, is warming. Precipitation patterns are changing, sea level is rising, the oceans are becoming more acidic, and the frequency and intensity of some extreme weather events are increasing. Many lines of independent evidence demonstrate that the rapid warming of the past half-century is due primarily to human activities.

The observed warming and other climatic changes are triggering wide-ranging impacts in every region of our country and throughout our economy. Some of these changes can be beneficial over the short run, such as a longer growing season in some regions and a longer shipping season on the Great Lakes. But many more are detrimental, largely because our society and its infrastructure were designed for the climate that we have had, not the rapidly changing climate we now have and can expect in the future. In addition, climate change does not occur in isolation. Rather, it is superimposed on other stresses, which combine to create new challenges.

## Ban Ki-moon Invites World Leaders to a Climate Summit in 2014 Catalyzing Climate Action: The Case for Global Action



UN Headquarters, New York      23 September 2014

<http://summit.sites.uniconnetwork.org/2013/09/24/ban-ki-moon-invites-world-leaders-to-a-climate-summit-in-2014/>

The benefits of taking action to address climate change have become ever more compelling. Many countries and businesses have already realized the economic opportunities and reduced risks related to decreasing greenhouse emissions and strengthening resilience. They are reaping the benefits of sustainable low carbon economic growth, resilient infrastructure, new markets, decent jobs, energy independence, women's empowerment, cleaner air, and improved public health.

Currently, the inter-related post-2015 development and climate processes present an unprecedented opportunity to advance sustainable development. Eradicating poverty and restructuring the global economy to hold global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius are goals that – acted on together – can provide prosperity and security for this and future generations.

To meet the full scale of the global climate challenge and seize the opportunities at hand, domestic efforts must be scaled up and simultaneously leveraged through an international framework that provides incentives. Combined, accelerated action and increased ambition will foster a 'race to the top' that can help avert the worst effects of climate change.

### 2014 Climate Summit

The Secretary-General will host a Climate Summit in September 2014 as an integral part of his strategy to engage leaders and advance climate action and ambition, drawing on his global convening power and harnessing the full strength of the UN system, working in partnership with all sectors of society.

The Summit will serve as a public platform for leaders at the highest level – all UN Member States, as well as finance, business, civil society and local leaders from public and private sectors – to:

- Catalyze ambitious **action on the ground** to reduce emissions and strengthen climate resilience and;

- Mobilize political will for an ambitious **global legal agreement** by 2015 that limits the world to a less than 2-degree Celsius rise in global temperature.
- Leaders are invited to bring bold announcements and actions to the 2014 Climate Summit.

### Implementation

The Secretary-General will engage a range of key stakeholders to seize opportunities for concrete action and build the necessary political will afforded by a gathering of global leaders. Work will build on existing processes and initiatives to foster action in areas that go far to reduce emissions and strengthen resilience – such as energy; short-lived climate pollutants; cities and transportation; land-use (e.g. related to sustainable agriculture and forestry); adaptation and disaster risk reduction; and climate finance and the economic drivers that cut across these and other climate-related sectors. Implementation of this strategy will be led by the Secretary-General, supported by the Climate Change Support Team (CCST) working closely with the UN System. Other relevant stakeholders will be engaged as appropriate.

The Summit is intended to be a solutions-focused Summit that is separate from, but complementary to, the UNFCCC negotiating process. It aims to provide evidence that leaders across sectors and at all levels are taking action, thus expanding the reach of what is possible today, in 2015, and beyond.

## **ebbf Spring Event in England**

A number of IEF members attended the ebbf spring event at Selsdon Park near London, England, on 9-11 May 2014. The meeting theme was "How can I influence my work and world?" with keynote speakers including Asim Haneef, who has created a reality TV show in Egypt about young business and social entrepreneurs; Marc Rivers of Switzerland on how he lives his personal spiritual values as a senior executive in a large corporation; Stephanie Akkaoui Hughes of Lebanon and the Netherlands, an architect who designs buildings to facilitate interactions; and Sjoerd Luteyn of the Netherlands on transforming companies into communities. IEF President Arthur Dahl has been advising Sjoerd's company on Baha'i principles that can change the way businesses operate. There were also several workshops in parallel sessions. Over a hundred people attended the event from as far away as Kuwait, Nepal and Guam.

The ebbf Governing Board, of which Arthur is also chairman, announced a change of name for ebbf - ethical business building the future, to reflect better its purpose and international scope. ebbf is a Baha'i-inspired organization like IEF, but working to apply values in business and the world of work. Sustainability is one of its core values. The two organizations collaborate closely and have twice held joint conferences. ebbf also announced a complete redesign of its web site at <http://ebbf.org/>. Its next annual conference will be held in Barcelona, Spain, on 2-5 October on the theme of justice in business. Registration is now open on the ebbf web site.

## **Women in Ecology**

A Baha'i Spring Camp was held in a large chalet in the village of La Chapelle d'Abondance in the French Alps on 27 April-3 May with participants from across Europe. The theme was the role and challenges of women in society, and Arthur Dahl made a presentation on "Women in Ecology" to emphasize the important role that women have played in advancing the field. He included profiles of Rachel Carson, the writer whose book "Silent Spring" in 1962 alerted the world to the dangers of pollution by pesticides; Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for inciting women to plant 20 million trees in Kenya; Sylvia Earle, ocean explorer and National Geographic explorer in residence; Jane Lubchenco, a leading ecologist and until recently Under-Secretary of Commerce and Administrator of NOAA in the USA, Donella Meadows, principal author of the report to the Club of Rome on "The Limits to Growth" that raised the issue of planetary limits in 1972; Julia Marton-Lefevre, Director-General of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN); Vandana Shiva, the famous Indian ecologist and activist; Leena Srivastava, energy and climate change specialist and Vice-Chancellor of TERI University in India; Marilyn Mehlmann, Secretary-General of GAP International (Global Action Plan for the Earth); Victoria Thoresen, Professor of Education in Norway and Director of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living; Irma Allen of Swaziland, a leading environmental educator and board chair of the Swaziland Environmental Agency; Marie Harder, Professor of Sustainable Waste Management at the University of Brighton and a 1000 Talents Professor at Fudan University in Shanghai; Minu Hemmati of Germany, leading international dialogues on sustainable development, gender and climate change; and Sylvia Karlsson-Vinhuizen, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, and one of the founders of IEF. Victoria and Sylvia are board members of IEF, Irma is a former board member, and Marilyn, Victoria, Irma, Marie, Minu and Sylvia have all spoken at IEF conferences. Arthur has met all of the women featured in his presentation except Rachel Carson, who died in 1964.

## Catholics gather at the Vatican for a major symposium on the environment



*Cardinal Maradiaga, President of Caritas Internationalis, who opened this important meeting*

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=703>

**May 6, 2014**

An international gathering of 41 academics, economists, environmentalists and human rights representatives has been meeting in the Pontifical Academy of Sciences within the Vatican, Rome, to address the topic: Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature, Our Responsibility. In a packed programme across six days delegates will discuss papers addressing issues of environmental exploitation, human rights, social inclusion and sustainability deriving from what is referred to as ‘unsustainable growth’.

The symposium was opened by Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, SDB of Honduras who is the president of Caritas Internationalis. Starting from the premise that “Nowadays man finds himself to be a technical giant and an ethical child.” the Cardinal’s address called for the re-introduction of ethics and values into society in order to do what is right and needful to achieve sustainability and social justice. Crucial to achieving this, he argued, was the need for education to emphasise values, stating: “The solution to mankind’s sustainability issues is not to be improvised: we must prepare ourselves through education by developing discerning citizens that are committed with the ideals of democracy, justice, and respect for one another and the environment.”

The Cardinal also stressed that this was something that was not the sole prerogative of Christians but should concern all cultures and religions ‘because we are all citizens of the same planet.’

Coming at a time when it is understood that Pope Francis is preparing an encyclical about humanity’s relationship to creation and following the canonisations of Pope John XXIII and Pope John-Paul II, both of whom had been instrumental in bringing environmental issues onto the agenda of Catholic spirituality this prestigious gathering is being seen as a highly significant consolidation of the role of the Church in the movement for sustainability.

## Solar Power Leader Barbados to Host World Environment Day 2014



**United Nations  
Environment  
Programme**



<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2788&ArticleID=10851&l=en>

**Bridgetown, Barbados, 9 May 2014** - Barbados, a Caribbean island at the cutting edge of the fight against climate change, will host this year's World Environment Day (WED) global celebrations on 5 June 2014, according to a joint announcement made today by the government of Barbados and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The theme for this year's celebrations is "Small Island Developing States and Climate Change". Barbados, a 430-square kilometer nation with a population of 270,000, is considered to be highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change - from agricultural impacts to the destruction of its coastal ecosystems.

### Further Resources

- [World Environment Day 2014](#)
- [UNEP Green Economy Initiative](#)
- [Green Economy Scoping Study - Barbados Synthesis Report](#)

However, this small nation has taken big steps to reduce its climate impact and to provide clean, renewable energy - as well as opportunities for green economic growth - to its people.

Among other things, Barbados has pledged to increase the share of renewable energy across the island to 29 percent of all electricity consumption by 2029. This would cut total electricity costs by an estimated USD 283.5 million and reduce CO2 emissions by 4.5 million tonnes, according to the government.

"I would like to take this opportunity also to formally announce that in less than four weeks time, the global spotlight will again be focused on Barbados as we have been selected to co-host the Global Event for World Environment Day 2014, to take place on 5 June. This event will once again give Barbados the opportunity to showcase its rich culture and tourism assets to the world," said Prime Minister of Barbados Freundel J. Stuart.

"Our target should be to place Barbados firmly on the world map in the context of the environment and sustainable development. This can only be achieved if all parties - public and private sector, NGOs and civil society - work together for a successful World Environment Day," he added.

It is estimated that Barbados' tourism sector, which contributes about 15 per cent of the island's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and its sugar industry, which contributes about 2 per cent, could both be severely affected by changing weather patterns.

In response to such threats, Barbados has made "Building a Green Economy: Strengthening the Physical Infrastructure and Preserving the

Environment" one of six concrete goals built into its National Strategic Plan (2006-2025).

"Small Island Developing States the world over are facing a host of risks related to climate change, from temperature increases that negatively affect agriculture to sea level rise that threatens the very existence of some nations," said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

"Barbados has put conservation and the transition to an inclusive green economy at the heart of its national strategy. Through this framework, it has enacted a number of proactive, concrete measures to combat climate change, including incentives that support one of the island's fastest growing sectors - solar power."

As the host of WED, Barbados will have the opportunity to showcase these initiatives and to act as an example for countless Small Island Developing States facing similar challenges. The country has shown tremendous leadership and political will, proving that the transition to a green economy is possible - even in countries facing the greatest threats - when robust environmental policy is translated into action on the ground," he added.

The island's over-reliance on imported fossil fuels has become one of its major environmental concerns. The National Strategic Plan, its new Medium Term Development Framework 2014-2020 and supporting fiscal framework are designed to ease this dependency by increasing the country's renewable energy supply, with a special focus on raising the number of household solar water heaters in Barbados.

In his Feature Address during the opening of the landmark Sustainable Energy for All Conference in May 2012, Prime Minister Stuart said: "at the regional level we realize that high oil prices have severely affected Caribbean competitiveness, with a negative fiscal and macro-economic impact on our fragile economies. For example, Barbados spent USD 393,538 million last year on oil imports, or 6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, which has impacted negatively on direct production costs and the overall competitiveness of the Barbadian economy."

He added: "we know that although many Small Island Developing States are energy deficient in conventional energy, limitless potential for renewable energy and energy efficiency resides in our countries. The fundamental issue thus is how do we, as Small Island Developing States with inherent structural problems and limited resources, convert this renewable energy potential into a tangible product that is accessible, affordable and adaptable?"

Solar water heaters are now a widely used renewable energy technology in Barbados, with installations in nearly half of the island's dwelling units. In 2002 alone, Barbados saved 15,000 metric tonnes of carbon emission and over USD 100 million in energy savings from the 35,000 solar hot water systems that had been installed at the time. The solar water heater use is one of the highest in the world (water heaters per thousand households).

Three Barbadian companies lead the installation and manufacturing of solar water heaters on the island, and they are already expanding the Caribbean market potential in the nearby islands of Trinidad and St. Lucia.

The solar water heater industry started in 1974 with the pioneering company Solar Dynamics. That early effort was also supported by the McGill University Bellairs Research Institute in the early 1970s. In recent times, that institution restarted its solar training programme with a focus on solar electric systems. With a regional outlook, the training has already been extended to Belize.

More recently, the Barbadian government has implemented several plans to further stimulate the use of solar electric systems. For example, from the USD 5,000 allotted per year under the 2008 modified Income Tax Allowance for Home Improvement, up to USD 1,000 can be used for energy audits.

The import duties on renewable energy electricity systems and VAT have been reduced to zero and companies involved in their development, installation or manufacturing are eligible for a 10-year tax free holiday.

Financial incentives for manufacturers, such as the provision of low-interest loans by the Barbados government, may further serve to assist the diversification and growth of the solar water heater industry.

During the November 2012 Energy Week of activities, Prime Minister Stuart stated: "In the same way that we pride ourselves on the penetration of solar water heaters, the next frontier is the erection of solar electricity systems and the use of other renewable energy sources."

In that vein, the government is rolling out a programme to outfit 19 government buildings, including nine schools, with solar photovoltaic systems. Prime Minister Stuart said that the initiative would "capture the interest and imagination of the next generation which will give impetus to this effort in making renewable energy truly the engine of the economy".

He also said that similar energy systems would be installed in hurricane shelters, which would also be equipped with the necessary back-up power to enable them to function effectively in the event of a hurricane or any other emergency.

With respect to transport, the Barbados government has also piloted the design and deployment of electric vehicles at their number one natural attraction, Harrison's Cave. In addition, there have been innovative tours with solar/electric trams of the historic city of Bridgetown - which has recently been designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO - since 2005.



These efforts combine the government's thrust to protect its natural and cultural heritage products while demonstrating innovative, Small Island Developing States-appropriate climate change mitigation opportunities.

In 2012, Barbados and UNEP launched the *Green Economy Scoping Study - Barbados Synthesis Report*, which was designed to identify challenges and opportunities in the island's transition to a Green Economy, and to accelerate that transition.

Projects and events in Barbados to celebrate WED will take place over five days. They will focus on climate adaptation technologies, business, sustainable resource management, protected areas, schools and Barbadian local culture, as well as spotlighting challenges and opportunities facing Small Island Developing States around the globe.

### **About World Environment Day**

The celebration of World Environment Day began in 1972 and has grown to become one of the main vehicles through which the United Nations encourages positive action for the environment.

WED activities take place year round but climax on 5 June.

Through WED, UNEP enables everyone to realize not only the responsibility to care for the Earth, but also reminds one and all of their individual power to become agents of change. Every action counts, and when multiplied by a global chorus, becomes exponential in its impact.

WED is a big celebration, engaging millions across the globe through events on the ground in over 100 countries. Every year, participants, young and old, organize clean up campaigns, art exhibits, tree-planting drives, concerts, dance recitals, recycling drives, social media campaigns and different contests themed around caring for the planet.

Register Your Activity Today and Be Counted. We invite you, your family, school, clubs, village, town, city or your country to celebrate this day. Join the global WED community to make this day happen.

**Further resources, contact: UNEP News Desk**  
[unepnewsdesk@unep.org](mailto:unepnewsdesk@unep.org)

## **Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology Website continued from Pg 1**

### **The Bahá'í Faith and Ecology**

**Arthur Lyon Dahl, Ph.D.**

#### **Introduction**

While individual Bahá'ís have been involved in ecology and environmental restoration with the encouragement of Bahá'í institutions since the 1930s, the formal implication of the Bahá'í International Community in environmental issues began with its representation at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, where two professional ecologists formed the Bahá'í delegation and a statement on the environment and human values was distributed. This was a natural extension of the fundamental Bahá'í principles of the oneness of humankind and the harmony of science and religion. The Baha'i International Community has subsequently presented statements and engaged in activities relevant to the environment and sustainability at many United Nations events relating Baha'i principles to the practical problems of the world today.<sup>1</sup>

#### **A unifying vision**

Bahá'í teachings apply the evolutionary concept to religion, describing the process of progressive revelation whereby all the great teachers or Manifestations of God, in founding the revealed religions, have renewed essential spiritual truths while adapting the social laws to the needs of their epoch and society. Civilization similarly evolves through higher levels of social organization, from tribe to city-state to nation and now to a world society. As Bahá'u'lláh, prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, put it, "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."<sup>2</sup> He also warned about material civilization carried to excess, and the

need for justice and moderation. The nations must heed His call to unite in the search for ways and means to meet the many environmental problems besetting our planet.

The Bahá'í writings emphasize the interrelatedness of all things. They contain a unifying vision of the nature and purpose of human life including an understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural environment. The human body is, like animals, subject to nature's laws, but human beings are endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality, and the intellectual reality of humans creates science and predominates over nature. Finally, there is a third reality in humans, the spiritual reality or soul, whereby the human being transcends nature and can evolve to achieve his or her higher human purpose.

### **Nature**

Nature is seen as a reflection of the sacred. The perfections and attributes of God are reflected in all things. Many ecological principles are found in the Bahá'í teachings, which accept the scientific evidence for evolution, recognizing that the growth and development of all things is gradual and their perfections appear by degrees. The physical world is a closely integrated, coherent entity like the human body. Cooperation and reciprocity are essential to the functioning of both nature and society. The interdependence of plants and animals is described, demonstrating that all beings are connected like a chain, and are subject to transformation and change, illustrated with the example of a food chain. There is beauty in diversity, whether in a garden or in the human family. The earth trodden beneath our feet is the source of our wealth and prosperity, and a model of humility. Bahá'ís are enjoined to show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.

The human relationship to nature is both physical and spiritual. "Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world."<sup>3</sup> We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us. Humans are organic with the world, and contact with nature is spiritually uplifting. All the Manifestations retreated to the wilderness to prepare for their spiritual missions. As Bahá'u'lláh put it: "The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies."<sup>4</sup>

### **Sustainable environmental management**

Sustainable environmental management is an important challenge. 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. Agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world are of fundamental interest, and every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the Earth's biodiversity and natural order. Therefore sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment humanity can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival. 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.

To achieve this requires a critical look at the present economy and consumer culture. Where belief in God has faded and traditional morality has been abandoned, selfishness is accepted as normal, corruption has spread, and greed, lust, indolence, pride, and violence have social and economic value. The dogmas of materialism and world-wide economic exploitation dominate political and economic thinking. The alternative Bahá'í vision sees each member of the race as born into the world as a trust of the whole. The challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, require the transformation of the world from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability. Bahá'í communities around the world are working for an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body, as well as its interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it. This will require economic systems that are strongly altruistic and cooperative in nature, provide meaningful employment and help to eradicate poverty. Institutionally, we need a federated world government with legislative, executive and judicial powers able to apply collective security and to manage the planet's natural resources and assure their equitable distribution.

## Individual responsibility

At the individual level, similar spiritual principles apply. Bahá'u'lláh said that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire. We should be content with little, be freed from all inordinate desire, and take from this world only to the measure of our needs, foregoing that which exceeds them. Everyone has an obligation to work, and work performed in a spirit of service is worship. Wealth is good, provided the entire population is wealthy, and that wealth is used in service to society. This change in our relationship to material things provides an antidote to excessive consumption and its environmental impacts. It frees us to focus on the real purpose of development, that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness. These teachings help to develop a sense of responsibility towards the natural environment and a long-term perspective towards planetary sustainability and the rights of future generations.

## About this Author

Arthur Lyon Dahl chose to study ecology because it reflected the Baha'i concept of unity in diversity. With a Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences from Stanford University and a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of California at Santa Barbara, he began a research career specializing in coral reef ecology at the Smithsonian Institution, before becoming the Regional Ecological Adviser with the South Pacific Commission in New Caledonia, and eventually a Deputy Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi, Kenya, and Coordinator of the UN System-wide Earthwatch in Geneva, Switzerland. At the same time he represented the Baha'i International Community at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972, and the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (2009), and participated in the World Summit on Religions and Conservation (Windsor, 1995), the Conference on Religion, Science and the Environment: the Black Sea in Crisis (1997), and the World Parliament of Religions (Barcelona, 2004) among many other meetings. His books include *Unless and Until: A Baha'i Focus on the Environment* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990) and *The Eco Principle: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis* (London: Zed Books and Oxford: George Ronald, 1996). He is President of the International Environment Forum, a Baha'i-inspired organization for environment and sustainability, and Chairman of the Board of ebbf - ethical business building the future.

## Endnotes

1 See for example “A Bahá'í Perspective on Nature and the Environment” (1986)<http://iefworld.org/bicpne.htm>; “The Bahá'í Statement on Nature” (1987) <http://iefworld.org/bicnat.htm>; “Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Bahá'í Faith” (1995)<http://statements.bahai.org/95-0406.htm>; “Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change” (2008) <http://www.bic.org/statements/seizing-opportunity-redefining-challenge-climate-change>; and “Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism” (2010)<http://www.bic.org/statements/rethinking-prosperity-forging-alternatives-culture-consumerism>.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, CIX, p. 215

3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, p. 142.

4 Bahá'u'lláh, in J. E. Esslemont (1923), *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. London: George Allen & Unwin, Chpt. 3, p. 40.

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