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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.

Next IEF Conference with UN High Level Political Forum in July

With the encouragement and collaboration of the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office, the IEF Governing Board has decided to organize its next International Conference in support of the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF) for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The HLPF will be meeting at the UN in New York on 9-18 July 2018. Since it is too early to know if we can partner in side events on the UN premises, or how many observers we can send, we have decided to make our main activity a virtual conference of webinars and on-line forums on the HLPF themes which we can offer to participants in the HLPF and more widely. If we can get some on-site activities approved, that would be a plus.

The HLPF theme this year is "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies", including water, energy, sustainable consumption and production, urban issues, and land and biodiversity, covering SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, and 17.

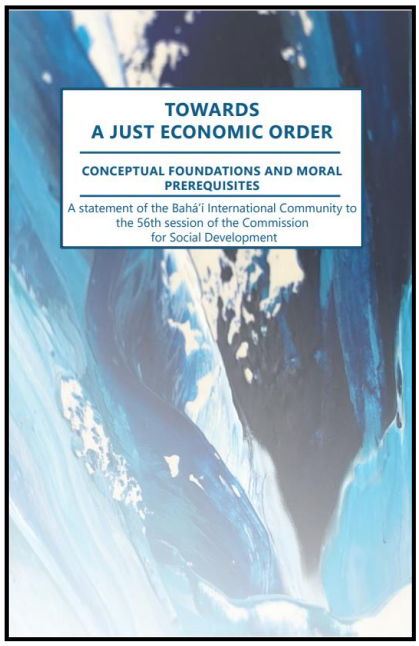
At this point, **the IEF board would like to know**:
1) who might be able to come to New York in July for an IEF conference,
2) who would be willing to serve on an organizing committee for such a conference,
3) who would agree to help draft an IEF statement on the overall HLPF theme or one of the SDGs being considered at the HLPF, and
4) for the virtual conference webinars and forums over the Internet, who could help to organize and moderate such an on-line conference/webinar on an appropriate platform.

Please contact the IEF secretariat (ief@iefworld.org) if you can help in any of these areas.

Towards a Just Economic Order:
Conceptual Foundations and Moral Prerequisites

A statement of the Baha'i International Community to the 56th session of the Commission for Social Development, New York, 29 January 2018

https://www.bic.org/statements/towards-just-economic-order-conceptual-foundations-and-moral-prerequisites



To eradicate poverty is to build the world anew - economically, but also morally, culturally, and socially. A world without poverty, its communities and patterns of life, would bear little resemblance to the one around us today. The Commission's work of "eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all", therefore, is not simply a matter of expanding access to material resources, challenging as that can be. Rather, it is an endeavor of structural and social transformation on scales never attempted before. And the magnitude of that work calls for new ways of understanding individual human beings and society as a whole.

Conceptual models of what is normal, natural, and possible exert a powerful influence on personal behavior. For example, individuals tend to make less generous choices the more they are exposed to the self-centered calculations inherent in classic economic theory. Such models also inform the structures of society, privileging certain kinds of values over others and shaping ways of seeing, understanding, and approaching the world. The models we employ, therefore, are of crucial importance. Some help to release latent potential, confer greater clarity of thought, illuminate unexpected paths forward, and facilitate constructive action. Others distort, constrain, and confuse.

Humanity has employed countless conceptual models throughout its history, their various elements contributing to progress in some instances and hindering it in others. But regardless of what has come before, it is clear that the transformational change required today calls for new vantage points from which to explore challenges, assess realities, and imagine solutions. We must therefore be prepared to assess - and if necessary, revise - the assumptions that have shaped the current international order and structures of society.

Consider, for example, the belief that humanity is inherently contentious and conflict is unavoidable. That human behaviour is driven primarily by self-interest, and prosperity must therefore be based on the pursuit of personal advantage. That the well-being of groups or nations can be meaningfully understood on their own, disconnected and in isolation from the well-being of humanity as a whole. That the contemporary world is characterized by a fundamental lack of human and material resources, rather than an abundance of them.

Notions such as these, implicit and unspoken in many cases, go largely unchallenged in contemporary discourse. But their real-world consequences are significant indeed. Can the belief that human beings are inherently selfish be anything but destructive when applied in contexts such as the community, the family, or the school? Can an understanding of economics grounded in a presumption of individuals or groups gaining advantage over others lead to anything but the grossly unequal conditions multiplying on every side? Alternatively, what would global economic structures look like if collaboration were understood to be a more powerful driver of development than competition? How would extremes of poverty and excesses of wealth be addressed if the good of the individual were truly understood to be inseparable from the good of the whole? What policies would be enacted if governmental priorities were shaped primarily by the interests of the citizenry at large, rather than by the preferences of a select few with privileged access to the halls of power?

Given the unprecedented pace of transition in the current age, the Bahá'í International Community calls on Member States and others at the Commission for Social Development to initiate a profound reevaluation of the assumptions on which development initiatives rest. Efforts must be made to ensure that the policies being undertaken by the international community are consonant with the values it is espousing, that the propositions

taken to be established fact are still valid in light of emerging global realities, that the axioms proclaimed in global fora are consistent with evidence encountered in the field. Consider, for example, the disconnect between an age in which countless aspects of daily life are impacted by profound global interdependence, on the one hand, and on the other, pronouncements from the highest levels that well-being is best sought through the pursuit of narrow national interest. Similarly contradictory is the supposition that unfettered competition could be compatible with the “collaborative partnership” and “spirit of strengthened global solidarity” envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other United Nations initiatives. These are issues of critical importance. Continued progress requires increasing clarity and depth of understanding about ourselves and the conditions around us. Only to the degree that our mental map of the world is accurate can we hope to chart a true course to a better future.

A systematic reassessment of this kind would involve actors of many types, within the United Nations and beyond. Academics might investigate the foundations of current models and the benefits and risks of alternatives - for example, economic models in which prosperity is more broadly defined and no longer seen as a product of production and consumption alone. Policy makers and arbiters of affairs at all levels might examine the presumptions underlying current policies and assess the possibility of unintended consequences - for example, whether assumptions of conflict in human nature might inadvertently perpetuate those very patterns of hostility. Practitioners might evaluate whether operating procedures and approaches run contrary to organizational values, reinforcing perceptions of otherness and undermining a stated commitment to equal partnership with local communities.

What might the reframing of such a discourse look like in practice? Consider the perceived lack of resources mentioned above. Data clearly demonstrate that ours is a world of abundance, at least in the aggregate. Global per capita GDP, for example, stood at $16,143 in 2016 - a figure that would represent a vast increase in monetary resources for the majority of the world’s people. Similarly, more than enough food is produced to feed all of humanity today. These are not new or novel observations. Yet countless discussions begin and end with a perceived lack of funds or supplies, rather than an exploration of why the vast resources available to the human race are utilized as they currently are.

Many organizations and individuals undoubtedly lack the resources they feel they need. Yet at the systemic level, the assumption that “there isn’t enough money” fundamentally misreads the relevant realities of the world. Financial resources are becoming increasingly concentrated in certain segments of society, generating both unconscionable extremes of wealth and inexcusable depths of poverty. Realities such as these are incompatible with the ideals of justice, equity, and dignity to which the global community has committed itself. In addition to moral considerations, these dynamics can be highly destabilizing and corrosive to the social fabric, and represent a clear and tangible danger to society. Yet the worst of their effects can be ameliorated through adjustments at the level of policy and practice, and all actors - governments, companies, citizens - should acknowledge their responsibility in this regard. The challenge, then, is not one of scarcity, but rather the choices and values that must inform the allocation of resources.

This example and others like it demonstrate the necessity of identifying the premises underlying approaches, and consciously exploring how they enhance or hinder efforts. Equally important is the ability to articulate the principles that current procedures and systems should be translating into on-the-ground realities. That the human race is one interdependent whole; that women and men are inherently equal; that force must be made the servant of justice; that truthfulness is the foundation of personal integrity and lasting social progress - if these are propositions that we believe in, our organizations and efforts must increasingly reflect and embody them at every level.

What is being called for is a review of the international community’s framework for collective thought and action. Such an effort cannot be confined to a one-time initiative, if it is to be effective. Rather, deep reflection, woven into the ongoing functioning of the entire United Nations system will be needed. Notable progress was made over the course of the Millennium Development Goals; the Sustainable Development Goals demand even wider vision and more creative thinking. It is time, then, to reassess foundational beliefs about ourselves, the nature of our relationships, and the realities shaping the world we live in. Only in this way can the groundwork for true and sustainable progress be laid.

Health, Climate and Small Island States

EDITORIAL / 01 FEB, 2018
By Patricia Espinosa and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

https://cop23.unfccc.int/news/health-climate-and-small-island-states

When people talk about climate change, they often use the word “rising” to describe the environmental impact. Rising temperatures. Rising sea levels. Rising fossil fuel emissions. The problem with this description is that it fails to mention people and the profound impact that climate change has on them and their health.

At the United Nations Climate Change conference of parties (COP23) held in Bonn in November 2017, Arnold Schwarzenegger said “I want the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to come up with a rule that no one is allowed to talk about climate change without talking about health.”

Climate change is much more than an environmental issue. It poses a serious threat to our health and survival. It impacts all of us, no matter where we live.

The health of humanity is directly related to the health of our environment. We depend on our environment for everything we are and everything we have – the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink.

Climate change increases the risks of extreme weather events that cause damage to our lives and livelihoods. Climate change fuels the spread of infectious disease such as malaria, dengue and cholera; it also increases the risk of noncommunicable diseases by polluting the air, food and water that sustain life.

Climate change is not a futuristic scenario that is unlikely to happen in our lifetime. People are feeling its impact right now in many parts of the world. A heatwave in the summer of 2003 in Europe caused more than 30 000 deaths, and was considered the worst natural disaster in Europe of the previous 50 years. The 2017 Atlantic hurricane season caused unprecedented levels of destruction across the Caribbean. Hurricane Irma was the most powerful ever recorded over the Atlantic. Just weeks later, Hurricanes Jose and Maria threatened areas already devastated by Irma.

By 2030, climate change is predicted to cost 2–4 billion United States dollars in direct health expenses each year.

Sadly, those who contribute least to the causes of climate change bear the most severe brunt of its impact. People living on small islands are on the frontline of the impacts of climate change.

Small island states, where an estimated 65 million people live, have long been recognized as especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Their situation is highlighted in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, by Ministers of Health at the 2008 World Health Assembly and in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

At the COP23, in partnership with the Fijian Presidency, WHO and the UN Climate Change secretariat launched a special initiative to protect people living in small island developing states from the health impacts of climate change.

The initiative has four main goals to be achieved by 2030, aligning with the deadline for the sustainable development goals. First, to support health leaders in small island developing states in drawing greater attention to the threats these nations face. Second, to gather evidence to build the business case for investments that combat the health effects of climate change. Third, to prepare for climate risks through preparedness and prevention policies and to build climate-proof health systems. Fourth, to triple the current financial support for climate and health in small island developing states. Despite

years of talk, the international response remains weak. Less than 1.5% of international finance for climate change adaptation is allocated to health projects, and small island developing states receive only a fraction of these resources.

Many small island states are already pioneering innovative approaches to improve the resilience of their health systems to climate change, such as building cyclone-resistant health facilities and using solar energy to power medical services in Barbados.

But it is not enough to simply ask these communities to adapt. We must also take action on the causes of climate change. Unless countries fully implement the Paris Agreement, climate change is going to increasingly threaten the health and wellbeing of people everywhere.

More than 90% of the world's population live in places where the air quality does not meet WHO standards. Air pollution causes an estimated 6.5 million premature deaths every year and is responsible for 1 in 3 deaths from lung cancer, stroke and chronic obstructive respiratory disease.

Addressing climate change presents an unprecedented opportunity for improving health, not just for people living on small islands. If the countries responsible for the highest carbon emissions take action to meet the Paris Agreement commitments, this would have significant and immediate benefits for the health of people living in industrialized countries. For example, an increase of 7% in clean energy investment for the period 2012–2040 could prevent 1.7 million premature deaths from outdoor air pollution and 1.6 million deaths from household pollution.

Our vision is that, by 2030, all health systems in small island states will be able to withstand climate change and all countries will have substantially reduced carbon emissions.

Patricia Espinosa is the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, located in Bonn, Germany. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is the Director-General of the World Health Organization, located in Geneva, Switzerland.

https://talanoadialogue.com/

Talanoa Dialogue on climate change

The UN climate change secretariat has called on stakeholders to submit recommendations on how the world can step up efforts to meet the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A website (https://talanoadialogue.com/) was launched on 26 January by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in support of the so-called 'Talanoa Dialogue', which aims to track progress against the Paris Agreement's goals and enhance work to cut global greenhouse gas emissions. Through the portal, stakeholders are invited to make submissions in response to three central questions: 'Where are we?'; 'Where do we want to go?' and; 'How do we get there?'

The Talanoa Dialogue was established at the COP23 summit in Germany in November by the meeting's Fijian chair. The term Talanoa refers to the Pacific Island practice of convening conversations to amicably share ideas and address an issue.

"Talanoa is a traditional word used in Fiji and across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue. The purpose of Talanoa is to share stories, build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good. The process of Talanoa involves the sharing of ideas, skills and experience through storytelling. During the process, participants build trust and advance knowledge through empathy and understanding. Blaming others and making critical observations are inconsistent with building mutual trust and respect, and therefore inconsistent with the Talanoa concept. Talanoa fosters stability and inclusiveness in dialogue, by creating a safe space that embraces mutual respect for a platform for decision making for a greater good."

The year-long process is designed to review, share, and strengthen existing national climate change commitments and international efforts to ramp up emission reduction efforts. The aim is to report back on progress at the next UN climate change summit in Poland later this year, where governments will be tasked with finalising the rules that will govern the Paris Agreement.

Present emissions reduction pledges - known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - made through the Paris Agreement are not enough to limit average global temperature increases to 'well below' 2C of warming by the end of the century. Campaigners are therefore hoping the Talanoa Dialogue and a more formal stock take process will help increase pressure on governments to come forward with stronger national action plans before 2020.

Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, said the new portal would help provide transparency and broaden participation in the dialogue process. "The portal is the gateway for the Talanoa Dialogue," said Espinosa in a statement. "It represents the central point for everyone to make their views heard around enhanced ambition. Additionally, it will make available other key resources for the dialogue."

The UNFCC explained the purpose of the dialogue was to "share stories, build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good", emphasising that the process was aimed at being constructive, facilitative and oriented towards solutions.

"I look forward to many governments and other actors making their submissions via the portal as part of world-wide efforts required for the next level of climate action and ambition," Espinosa added.

Do any IEF members have relevant stories that could be shared?

Sources (in part): https://cop23.unfccc.int/news/un-opens-talanoa-dialogue-portal-aiming-for-higher-climate-ambition and http://unfccc.int/focus/talanoa_dialogue/items/10265.php

UN Environment and Faith-based Organizations

Submitted by Arthur Dahl

In January 2018, UN Environment finalised its Strategy on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations. Understanding the key role that faith-based organizations play at the global, regional and local levels, UN Environment supports the UN-wide task force on Religion and Development. UN Environment is taking the lead in establishing an innovative strategy to engage and partner with faith-based organizations to deliver on Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strategy builds on the 5 principles (People living on a healthy Planet, enjoying Prosperity and Partnerships in Peaceful societies), with three overarching goals: 1) Leadership for policy impact; 2) Financing to support SDGs; and 3) Knowledge-based decision support system. The three goals will largely depend on mobilizing

local communities; co-ordinating communications and advocacy; fostering south-south cooperation; engaging in faith-Environment thematic conversations and empowering UN Environment corporate engagement.

The Strategy includes three goals:
GOAL 1: Strengthen Partnerships with Faith-Based Organizations' Leadership for Policy Impact
GOAL 2: Green Faith-Based Organizations' Investments, Operations and Assets
GOAL 3: Knowledge-Based Decision Support System
For each, it provides detailed lists of outputs and activities.

It reviews past collaboration between UN Environment and FBOs since 1986, and quotes Maurice Strong, the first Executive Director of UN Environment, who said: "It is the responsibility of each human being today to choose between the force of darkness and the force of light. We must therefore transform our attitudes, and adopt a renewed respect for the superior laws of Divine Nature."

It includes the importance of bridging science and religion, encouraging interfaith understanding and collaboration, and collecting and sharing best practices. It recognises that the collaboration of Faith-based organizations will be essential to leave no one behind as called for in the UN 2030 Agenda.

For UN Environment, an integrated approach should facilitate the integration of religious and cultural values to ensure inclusive green and transformative development through adopting lifestyles that are informed by faith-based values and behaviours to achieve sustainable consumption and production. The integrated approach coupled with cultural and religious values can promote innovative nature-based solutions, respect for traditional and indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity, exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care. This coupling of environmental sustainability and duty of care can be the corner stone for a common vision that enhances the role of religion and culture in achieving sustainability. This will be implemented through UN Environment's global initiative to strategically engage with faith-based organizations with a mission to "To Encourage, Empower and Engage with Faith-Based Organizations as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2030." To be able to do so, the organization will engage with faith-based organizations to realize an impact on local communities sustainable livelihoods based on common spiritual values. The three goals of the strategy will largely depend on mobilizing local communities; communications and advocacy; south-south cooperation; faith-Environment thematic conventions and empowering UN Environment corporate engagement.

The strategy was finalised after a consultation meeting at UN Environment headquarters in Nairobi in November 2017, at which the International Environment Forum was invited to present the Baha'i perspective (see the December 2017 Leaves https://iefworld.org/newslt102).

Millennium Alliance for Humanity and Biosphere

https://iefworld.org/node/910

More than 50 years ago, one of Arthur Dahl's professors at Stanford University was Paul Ehrlich, who introduced Arthur to the science of ecology. He has since become a leading thinker in population studies and conservation biology. A few years ago, he admitted that science alone was not going to save the world, and that something like a religion was needed to motivate action. As a dedicated humanist, he founded the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and Biosphere (MAHB) (https://mahb.stanford.edu/) to try to fill the gap.

The MAHB's humanists collaborate to:
1. Understand and communicate foresight intelligence; and
2. Create a vision of a plausible and compelling world in 2050 which is moving towards sustainability and social equity.

The MAHB is an Alliance of individuals and organizations concerned about the existential threats to civilization. It is working to create a vision of a world moving rapidly towards sustainability in 2050. MAHB teams are

defining what a future smart world in 2050 might look like—a compelling world of some 9 billion people. Building on a growing scholarly effort, the MAHB is in the process of describing economic systems that depend on agility and equity without depending on growth, social systems that recognize the limits of our ecosystems, energy and resource infrastructure, and governance for a world where most people can meet their basic needs while enjoying a high quality of life.

The MAHB includes scholars working across disciplines to build the knowledge that is necessary for civil society and governments to act in ways that will have the highest positive impact quickly; it is assembling resources on the MAHB website to become the "go to" place for the best literature, multi-media materials, analysis, movies, and editorials on the interconnected issues threatening humanity and it's life support systems. The MAHB website catalogs and makes available ideas of activities for high impact action. All of this is done with a sense of urgency. If we are to reverse the degradation of the systems that support civilization, we need to act now. The MAHB aspires to make available the tools necessary for fostering a contagion, a passion for action.

One MAHB member, Jeremy Lent, published a blog on 2 January on "What Will It Really Take to Avoid Collapse?" (https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/avoid-collapse/). A few excerpts from his blog follow:

"Fifteen thousand scientists have issued a dire warning to humanity about impending collapse but virtually no-one takes notice. Ultimately, our global systems, which are designed for perpetual growth, need to be fundamentally restructured to avoid the worst-case outcome." [see the article in the December IEF Leaves https://iefworld.org/newslt102]

"For a moment, the most important news in the entire world flashed across the media like a shooting star in the night sky. Then it was gone. In November, over fifteen thousand scientists from 184 countries issued a dire warning to humanity. Because of our overconsumption of the world's resources, they declared we are facing 'widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss.' They warned that time is running out: 'Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory.'

"This is not the first such notice. Twenty-five years ago, in 1992, 1,700 scientists (including the majority of living Nobel laureates) sent a similarly worded warning to governmental leaders around the world. In ringing tones, they called for a recognition of the earth's fragility and a new ethic arising from the realization that 'we all have but one lifeboat'.

"Along with their warning, the scientists list a dozen or so examples of the kind of actions that could turn humanity's trajectory around. These include indisputably necessary strategies such as halting the conversion of native habitats into farmland; restoring and rewilding ecologies; phasing out fossil fuel subsidies; and promoting dietary shifts toward plant-based foods. With the future of humanity at stake, why aren't we already doing these things? What will it really take for our civilization to change course and save itself from destruction?

"Which leads us to some of the underlying structural changes that need to occur if human civilization is to avoid collapse. The fundamental problem is brutally simple: our world system is based on the premise of perpetual growth in consumption, which puts it on a collision course with the natural world. Either the global system has to be restructured, or we are headed for a catastrophe of immense proportions that has never been experienced in human history. However, the transnational corporations largely responsible for driving this trajectory are structurally designed to prevent the global changes that need to take place.

"Like any Ponzi scheme, this global growth frenzy is based on maintaining the illusion for as long as possible. Once it becomes clear that this rate of growth is truly unsustainable, the whole house of cards will come tumbling down. We saw in the 2008 financial meltdown a relatively tame dress rehearsal for what a full-scale financial collapse would look like.

"However, the only thing that will truly avert collapse will be a radical restructuring of the economic system that is driving us ever more rapidly to that precipice. This will only come about when enough of us are ready to jettison the consumer values that pervasive mainstream culture foists on us. In their place, we need to find

other sources for meaning in our lives: growing the quality of our experiences rather than our consumption, building our communities together, and reconnecting with the natural world.

“There are radically different ways for a society to function effectively that could apply to nations around the world if given half a chance. A flourishing future might involve more cooperative ventures, protection and expansion of the commons, and enhanced global governance with strict penalties for those who destroy ecological wellbeing. Collapse isn’t the only future in store for humanity—it’s merely the one we’re headed for unless and until we change course. Since the mainstream media isn’t going to get the word out, it has to be up to each of us who cares about the future of the human race. So, let’s get to it.”

To read the whole blog, go to https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/avoid-collapse/

The end of Western civilization?

Submitted by Arthur Dahl
https://iefworld.org/node/909

There have been warnings of the collapse of civilization from the scientific community for decades, from “The Limits to Growth" in 1972 (see my reflections at https://iefworld.org/node/838) and Jared Diamond's "Collapse" to the more recent work of Peter Turchin (see my reviews of War and Peace and War (https://iefworld.org/node/842), instability (https://iefworld.org/node/837) and Ultrasociety (https://iefworld.org/node/852). When both my local supermarket chain's weekly magazine and "New Scientist" had cover stories on the subject the same week, it was clear that the threat is now being taken seriously. The evidence can be summarized as follows.

The "New Scientist" cover on 20 January headlined "The Writing on the Wall: The worrying signs the civilisation has started to collapse". It referred to Laura Spinney's article (pp. 29-31) "There are disturbing hints that Western civilisation is starting to crumble". She notes that "scientists, historians and politicians alike have begun to warn that Western culture is reaching a critical juncture. Cycles of inequality and resource use are heading for a tipping point that in many past civilisations precipitated political unrest, war and finally collapse." She explains the difficulty of defining both collapse and Western civilization, but describes the work of a number of researchers looking for patterns in the rise and fall of ancient civilizations that might suggest what is coming for us.

She starts with Peter Turchin, whose work I have been following for a number of years, whose mathematical equations find patterns that link social factors such as wealth and health inequality to political instability, with a two century cycle of inequality and a fifty year cycle of peaceful and turbulent generations, with the most turbulent parts both cycles coinciding in around 2020. Another prediction by historians from 1997 also identified a crisis in America in the 2020s.

Other researchers have explored what causes turbulence to lead to collapse. A mathematical modeller of predator-prey relationships found that, when both extreme inequality and resource depletion coincide, collapse can become irreversible. The rich can avoid the effects of resource depletion for longer, and resist change until it is too late. When this extension is based on non-renewable resources, as today with fossil fuels, the collapse is much deeper. At the minimum, there could be a rapid loss of complexity, with simpler, smaller scale societies surviving. One researcher, on the contrary, predicts a shift up in complexity, with national governments being replaced by less centralized networks of control as the world becomes an integrated whole. Borders would disappear and cultural identity would be split between local communities and a global system of regulation.

None of these researchers are optimistic about the future for the West. Analytical long-term thinking that finds solutions to problems leads to the dominance of short-term automatic inflexible thinking using technology without foresight, as with climate change and antibiotic resistance. People keep up self-destructive behaviour despite warnings from more analytical thinkers, and technology innovation cannot find solutions. The researchers propose solutions, ranging from education in analytical thinking to more progressive taxes on the rich to reduce debt and controlling population growth, but there is little will to apply them. The article concludes

that the survival of the West will depend on the speed at which we can adapt, reducing fossil fuel use and inequality, and stopping quarrelling among elites.

The article in Migros Magazine (Léderrey 2018) also says it is urgent to prepare for the end of our civilization, which could happen within a decade or two, and says now is time to prepare for what will come after. Experts in different fields all see a collapse coming, but do not coordinate their perspectives. We are going faster and faster into the wall, and see it coming, but still accelerate. Individualism is a luxury of the rich, while scarcity requires solidarity. If we enter a period of scarcity with a culture of egoism, we shall see social catastrophes. The article concludes that we need to balance competition with cooperation.

From a scientific systems perspective, it is difficult to argue with the views expressed. Western material civilization is rapidly reaching and overshooting planetary limits, with climate change as one obvious example. From a Bahá'í perspective also, we are going through simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration, as the old order is rolled up to clear the way for a new one. Rather than responding with fear or denial, we need to see the opportunities that these crises will bring to enable the needed transformation in society and the economy, and put our energies into experimenting with alternatives for the future. The more we advance in creating new communities with justice and solidarity, the more resilient we shall be to face whatever may be coming.

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Technological Obsolescence

Submitted by IEF Member Charles Boyle on 4. February 2018
https://iefworld.org/node/907

A summary arising from an "Elevate" workshop exploring environmental concerns:
Why do you imagine that the privilege of license to extract, refine and sell oil should be a presumed right? Those who made rotary dial phones, typewriters, who mined mercury, who divined animal entrails, food tasters, made sash windows, who lit theatres with magnesium powder and streets with gas lights, who collected the "night soil", pressed vinyl records and hand-cranked cinema projectors, brewed beer in wooden barrels, shaved their faces with obsidian stones, who hand-fired clay bricks and cut stone to build houses and cut trees by hand, who cobbled streets and built stage coaches, who had to find a bush, an outhouse to keep clean, who crouched over fires stirring a soup made from their own garden produce, who believed 64k was big enough for anyone, who hand-made chain mail, who scribed ideas on tablets of clay and bought wine in skins, who lit great fires in the stone castles of Europe, who spent months travelling from China to Italy to trade goods, who ploughed fields with ox-drawn ploughs, who fought the plague with spells and potions, whose idea of weapon of choice comprised a steel blade or an assemblage of bent wood and animal guts, who built hand-set printing presses, who rode furiously between staging posts to make sure you got your letter within three weeks, whose epic hand-written transcriptions bespangled libraries, who built wooden ships and wove great sails, who boiled whale carcasses for lamp oil, who soldered shut steel cans for arctic exploration, who supplied sheep skin and tapestries to close off window openings, whose opium trade was their central economic activity, who collected rainwater to survive and wove cloth by hand, who were forced to attend only live performances because that was all there were, who made pencils made of lead and quill pens of split feathers, and those who once shaped the spectacles of the emperor - all have gone, not because they were inherently bad, but because something better, cleaner, safer, more efficient came along. And so it will be with oil sands.

2018 International Year of the Reef Kicks off with Appeal by COP23 President

2018 International Year of the Reef

https://cop23.unfccc.int/news/2018-international-year-of-the-reef-kicks-off-with-appeal-by-cop23-president

UN Climate Change News, 17 January 2018 - The 3rd International Year of the Reef began today with a call by the Prime Minister of Fiji and President of the Bonn UN Climate Change Conference COP23 President Frank Bainimarama to strengthen collective efforts to protect coral reefs, one of the most diverse and important ecosystems on Earth.

The International Year of the Reef (IYOR 2018) (https://www.icriforum.org/about-icri/iyor) is designed to raise awareness about the importance of, and threats to, coral reefs and associated ecosystem. It is also designed to promote partnerships between governments, the private sector, academia and civil society, and share information on best practices for the sustainable coral reef management.

“In one of the great tragedies of the modern world, these reefs are slowly dying. And we are here today to issue a plea to the world to summon the collective will to reverse this process. To save our coral reefs before it is too late,” said Prime Minister Bainimarama in a speech today from Fiji.

Kicking off the International Year of the Reef, Prime Minister and COP President Frank Bainimarama announced the nomination of large portions of Fiji’s Great Sea Reef as a Ramsar site in an effort to protect it from threats, including climate change, chemical and waste water run-off from neighbouring urban settlement, and industry.

A Ramsar site is designated under international treaty as a wetland important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life. Under the convention, wetlands are broadly defined and include areas such as coral reefs.

Protecting coral reefs is crucial for food security

Coral reefs occupy less than one tenth of 1% of the ocean floor. Yet they represent diverse ecosystems and are home to a quarter of all known marine species, contributing to food security through fisheries and providing multiple economic benefits. Due to overfishing and an increase in coral bleaching caused by climate change, coral reefs and the benefits they provide are now under threat.

"Ecosystems built up over millions of years gone within the space of a generation. It cannot happen. It must not happen. We must come together as a global community as never before to prevent it. And today, as COP23 President, I appeal to every single person on earth to join our struggle to reverse this process”, said Mr. Bainimarama.

Full and rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement key to protection of corals

To tackle the threats posed to coral reefs by climate change, Prime Minister Bainimarama underscored the significance of aiming for the lower limit of the temperature rise as envisaged in the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement.

“I want to stress as COP President that it is absolutely critical if we are to save our coral reefs that the world embrace the 1.5 degree warming target and achieve net zero emissions within a few decades. As a landmark UNESCO report stated last year, achieving 1.5° is the only opportunity we have to save our reefs, the only way to avert extinction. And all around us, the evidence is mounting that time is running out,” said Prime Minister Bainimarama.

Source: https://cop23.unfccc.int/news/2018-international-year-of-the-reef-kicks-off-with-appeal-by-cop23-president

Coral reefs 'at make or break point', UN environment head says

Erik Solheim cites 'huge decline' in world's reefs but says shift from coal and new awareness of plastic pollution are good news

MICHAEL SLEZAK @**MIKEYSLEZAK,** FRI 19 JAN 2018 00.59 EST LAST MODIFIED ON FRI 19 JAN 2018 01.00 EST

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jan/19/coral-reefs-at-make-or-break-point-un-environment-head-says

The battle to save the world's coral reefs is at "make or break point", and countries that host them have a special responsibility to take a leadership role by limiting greenhouse gas emissions, plastic pollution and impacts from agriculture, the head of the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep) has said.

Speaking to the Guardian after the launch of International Coral Reef Initiative's international year of the reef, Erik Solheim said he expected governments to take their efforts on reef protection in 2018 beyond symbolic designation.

"We expect governments to step up to concrete actions," Solheim said.

To kick off that effort, Fiji's prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, has announced new protections for large portions of the Great Sea Reef, by nominating it a Ramsar site. The Ramsar Convention gives protection to wetlands – including coral reefs – that are important for the conservation of global biodiversity and for sustaining human life.

Announcing the nomination, Bainimarama said it was shocking that this might be the last generation to witness the beauty of coral reefs.

"Today I appeal to every single person on Earth to help us. We must replace the present culture of abuse with a culture of care," he said.

Solheim said another significant step was taken this year when Belize imposed a moratorium on oil exploration and extraction in its waters – a move the Belizean prime minister said was a first for a developing country.

"We have seen a huge decline in the reefs and that is absolutely serious," Solheim said. "But there are also signs of change. We see now a huge global shift from coal to solar and wind and that is very good news for our efforts to reduce the effects of climate change.

"And we have seen a huge shift in the awareness of the problem of plastic pollution," he said, noting there have been many moves around the world to ban various forms of plastic pollution.

Solheim said that while the decline of reefs was a global problem that needed coodinated action, host countries had a special responsibility.

"We expect Australia and the Pacific Islands and the Carribbean to protect their coral reefs – they can do so much," he said.

He called on Australia to do more to mitigate climate change. "I strongly encourage Australia to transform its energy mix from coal to solar and wind and renewables – that is happening, but the faster it happens the better."

Solheim said failure to act now would bring about a major catastrophe.

"Beyond the complete moral failure of destroying the enormous beauty and all the different species in the ocean living in the reefs, it would also be an economic disaster," he said.

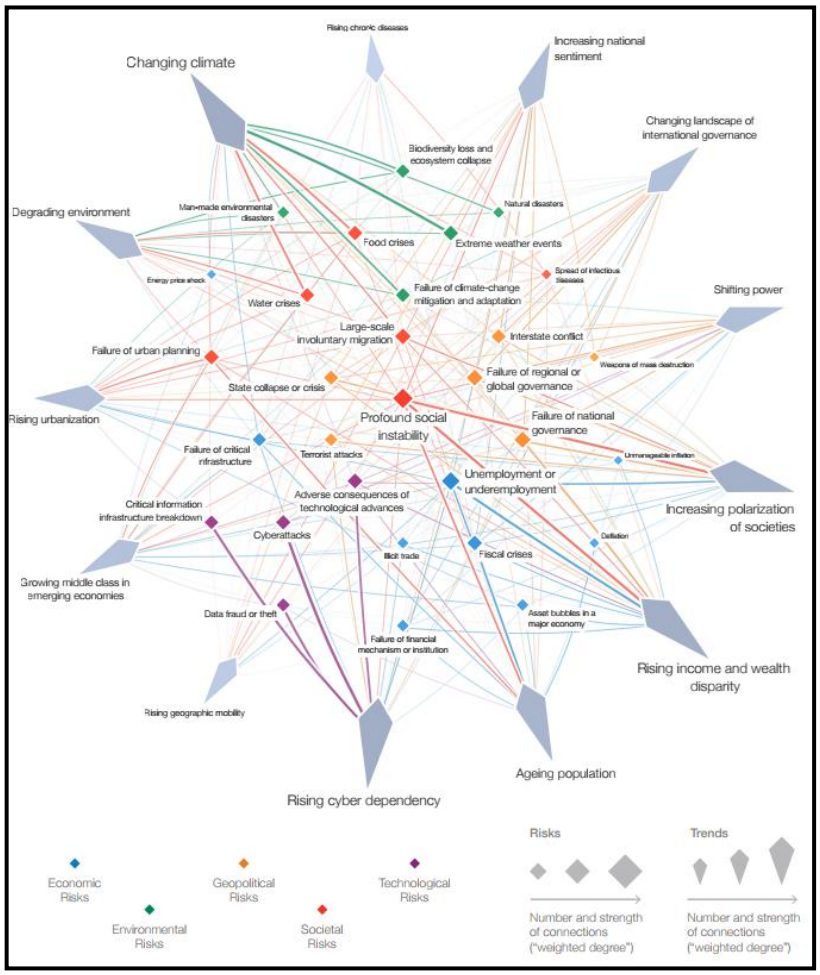
Estimates vary, but coral reefs around the world are thought to sustain the lives of about one billion people, by supporting food sources, protecting coastlines or providing other economic support.

That is particularly true of developing countries, but reefs also support thousands of jobs in Australia, Solheim said.

"It would have a huge impact for Australia – the reduction of tourism, and an impact on the fishing industry. Tourism is the most rapidly growing business on the planet and a huge job provider. At a time when every nation is desperate for jobs, restoring reefs is fundamental to economic success everywhere."

Unep also announced it would be working in collaboration with WWF to "drive an urgent response to combat the decline of coral".

WEF The Global Risks Report 2018 13th Edition



https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2018

Each year the Global Risks Report works with experts and decision-makers across the world to identify and analyze the most pressing risks that we face. As the pace of change accelerates, and as risk interconnections deepen, this year's report highlights the growing strain we are placing on many of the global systems we rely on.

The Global Risks Report 2018 is published at a time of encouraging headline global growth. Any breathing space this offers to leaders should not be squandered: the urgency of facing up to systemic challenges has intensified over the past year amid proliferating signs of uncertainty, instability and fragility.

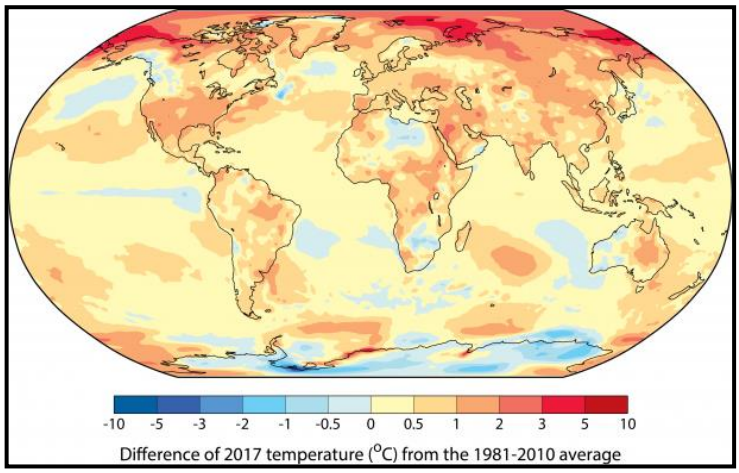
This year's report covers more risks than ever, but focuses in particular on four key areas: environmental degradation, cybersecurity breaches, economic strains and geopolitical tensions. And in a new series called "Future Shocks" the report cautions against complacency and highlights the need to prepare for sudden and dramatic disruptions.

The 2018 report also presents the results of our latest Global Risks Perception Survey, in which nearly 1,000 experts and decision-makers assess the likelihood and impact of 30 global risks over a 10-year horizon. Over this medium-term period, environmental and cyber risks predominate. However, the survey also highlights elevated levels of concern about risk trajectories in 2018, particularly in relation to geopolitical tensions.

Download the 80 page PDF Report "World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2018" at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GRR18_Report.pdf

WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION
Weather · Climate · Water

WMO confirms 2017 among the three warmest years on record



https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-confirms-2017-among-three-warmest-years-record

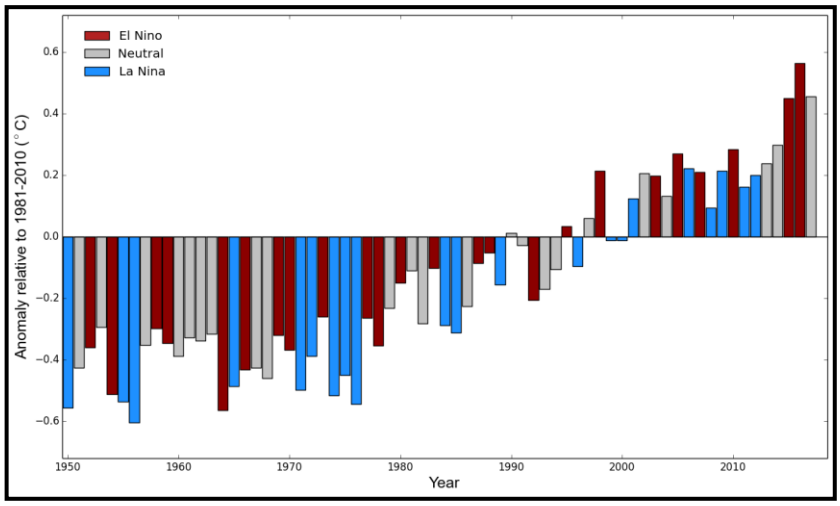
18 January 2018 (WMO) - In a clear sign of continuing long-term climate change caused by increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, 2015, 2016 and 2017 have been confirmed as the three warmest years on record. 2016 still holds the global record, whilst 2017 was the warmest year without an El Niño, which can boost global annual temperatures.

A consolidated analysis by the World Meteorological Organization of five leading international datasets showed that the global average surface temperature in 2017 was approximately 1.1° Celsius above the pre-industrial era.

The year 2016 remains the warmest year on record (1.2°C above preindustrial era). Global average temperatures in 2017 and 2015 were both 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. The two years are virtually indistinguishable because the difference is less than one hundredth of a degree, which is less than the statistical margin of error.

“The long-term temperature trend is far more important than the ranking of individual years, and that trend is an upward one, “said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas. “Seventeen of the 18 warmest years on record have all been during this century, and the degree of warming during the past three years has been exceptional. Arctic warmth has been especially pronounced and this will have profound and long-lasting repercussions on sea levels, and on weather patterns in other parts of the world.”

The globally averaged temperature in 2017 was about 0.46°C above the 1981-2010 long-term average (14.3°C). This 30-year baseline is used by national meteorological and hydrological services to assess the averages and variability of key climate parameters, such as temperature, precipitation and wind, which are important for climate sensitive sectors such as water management, energy, agriculture and health.



In addition to the global warming due to rising greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere, the climate also has a naturally occurring variability due to phenomena such as El Niño, which has a warming influence, and La Niña, which has a cooling influence. The strong 2015/2016 El Niño contributed to the record temperature in 2016. By contrast, 2017 started with a very weak La Niña and also finished with a weak La Niña.

“Temperatures tell only a small part of the story. The warmth in 2017 was accompanied

by extreme weather in many countries around the world. The United States of America had its most expensive year ever in terms of weather and climate disasters, whilst other countries saw their development slowed or reversed by tropical cyclones, floods and drought," said Mr Taalas.

WMO will issue its full Statement on the State of the Climate in 2017 in March. This report will provide a comprehensive overview of temperature variability and trends, high-impact events, and long-term indicators of climate change such as increasing carbon dioxide concentrations, Arctic and Antarctic sea ice, sea level rise and ocean acidification. The final statement will include information submitted by a wide range of United Nations agencies on human, socio-economic and environmental impacts as part of a drive to provide a more comprehensive, United Nations-wide policy brief for decision makers on the interplay between weather, climate and water and the United Nations global development goals.

WMO uses datasets (based on monthly climatological data from observing sites) from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and the United Kingdom's Met Office Hadley Centre and the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit in the United Kingdom.

It also uses reanalysis datasets from the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts and its Copernicus Climate Change Service, and the Japan Meteorological Agency. This method combines millions of meteorological and marine observations, including from satellites, with models to produce a complete reanalysis of the atmosphere. The combination of observations with models makes it possible to estimate temperatures at any time and in any place across the globe, even in data-sparse areas such as the polar regions.

The World Meteorological Organization is the United Nations System's authoritative voice on Weather, Climate and Water

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The three conventional surface temperature data sets are NOAA's NOAAGlobalTemp data set, Met Office Hadley Centre and Climatic Research Unit HadCRUT.4.6.0.0 data set and NASA GISS's GISTEMP data set. They use measurements of air temperature over land and sea-water temperature measurements over oceans to estimate temperature anomalies around the globe. The reanalyses are the ERA-Interim of the European Centre for Medium Weather Forecasts and the JRA-55 of the Japan Meteorological Agency. Despite the very different approach, the estimates of global average temperatures produced by these reanalyses are in good agreement with the conventional surface temperature datasets

WMO now uses 1981-2010 as a baseline for computing Temperature variations at monthly, seasonal and annual time-scales. This replaces the 1961-1990 baseline used previously. The 1981-2010 period is also recommended by WMO to compute the climatological standard normal for operational climate monitoring as it is more representative of current climatic conditions. It allows a consistent reporting of information from satellite and reanalysis systems, some of which do not extend back to 1960, alongside with traditional data sets based on surface-based-observations managed by the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services of the 191

WMO Member States and territories. For global average temperatures, the 1981-2010 period is approximately 0.31±0.02°C warmer than that of 1961-1990. The change in the baselines has no influence on trend analysis.

WMO uses the period 1880-1900 as a reference period for pre-industrial conditions allowing early instrumental observations to be used for estimating pre-industrial temperature conditions.

Wilmette Institute - Understanding Climate Change

Second-Term Course: Understanding climate change for your good and the worldwide common good
Lead Faculty: Christine Muller
Faculty: Arthur Lyon Dahl, Laurent Mesbah
Duration of course: Eight weeks (April 1 - May 26, 2018)

The Universal House of Justice affirms, in a November 29, 2017 letter, that climate change is a vital issue “with profound implications for the common good," upholds the importance of science, and expresses its hope that Baha'is will "continually grow in their capacity to make a distinctive and effective contribution to addressing the multitudinous problems afflicting society and the planet, including those associated with climate change." This course on **Climate Change** will provide a basic understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change, discuss its ethical challenges, and relate them to the spiritual teachings of the world's religions, particularly those of the Baha'i Faith. It will help you consider changes in your lifestyle to bring greater coherence to your life and show you how to incorporate environmental and social responsibility in Baha'i core activities and community gatherings. It will also assist you to elevate public discourse above partisan politics by introducing spiritual responses to the climate crisis. The course, which is open to people of all, or no, religious backgrounds, includes many optional resources for those who wish to delve more deeply into climate-change issues.

Extreme natural events such as storms, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires, as well as heavy downpours, floods, and mud slides have become more frequent and severe. Although many of these climate-related natural disasters have already caused much human suffering and economic loss, they are just the first signs of a changing climate caused by global warming. Projections for the future are alarming. Rising sea-levels threaten low-lying coastal areas all over the world, including large coastal cities. The people who suffer first and the most are the poor, people of color, and indigenous people, while the rich people of the world are most responsible for the warming of the Earth. Therefore, many people of faith see climate change as an issue of justice. At the same time, many people are confused, because climate change is a complex issue and because political and vested interests have shed false doubts about climate science.

This course on **Climate Change** provides a basic understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change, discusses its ethical challenges, and relates them to the spiritual teachings of the world’s religions, particularly the Bahá’í Faith. It will help you consider changes in your lifestyle to bring greater coherence to your life and show you how to incorporate environmental and social responsibility in your community gatherings. It elevates public discourse above partisan politics by introducing spiritual responses to the climate crisis and demonstrates how the harmony of science and religion can be applied for the well-being of humankind.
The course, which is open to people of all, or no, religious backgrounds, includes many optional resources for those who wish to delve more deeply into climate-change issues.

Translating IEF materials into Farsi/Persian

As mentioned in the newsletter a few months ago, the IEF has received a request to translate some of the educational materials on its web site into Farsi/Persian to make them more accessible to students in the Baha’i Institute of Higher Education. We have a few volunteers for translation, but need more help, and in particular someone who could design and manage a Farsi/Persian language section of our web site. **If you are interested in assisting with this effort to support students in need, please contact the IEF secretariat at ief@iefworld.org**.

ABS ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES NORTH AMERICA

Association of Baha'i Studies of North America – Agriculture Working Group

Are you interested in joining an ongoing consultation on the role of agriculture in "the reconstruction of the world"? We are encouraged to increase our involvement in the discourses of society and to "remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing…"

The Association of Baha'i Studies of North America has approved an Agriculture Working Group (AWG) to take this discussion forward, and it is meeting for the first time this month in North Carolina at the home of IEF member Winnie Merritt.

The group will work to:

- comprehend and analyze discourse in agriculture;
- possibly participate on the ABS conference agenda;
- possibly organize meetings outside the annual conference of the ABS;
- stimulate research and presentations;
- foster growth in a growing range of participation.

The next ABS Conference takes place in Atlanta, Georgia, on 9-12 August 2018. More information is on their website https://bahai-studies.ca/. **To join a contact list for the AWG, write to wdjmerritt@gmail.com**.

Update your IEF user profile

All IEF members, associates and registered users have a user file on the IEF web site, and many files have not been updated since joining the IEF. In particular, if a member changes their email address and does not advise the secretariat, our mailings bounce and the member is "lost". The user file also makes it possible to update entries in the IEF directory of members, **To update your user file on the IEF web site (https://iefworld.org), enter your user name and password, and access your file**. If you have forgotten your password, or not changed the temporary password originally assigned, write to info@iefworld.org.