



**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

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.

23rd ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Auckland, New Zealand and over the Internet, 5 April 2019

The 23rd General Assembly of the International Environment Forum was held in Auckland, New Zealand, and over the Internet using the Zoom platform on Friday 5 April 2019. Eight members were able to participate, three in person: Arthur Dahl (Switzerland), Marjolein Lips-Wiersma (New Zealand) and Dennis Worley (New Zealand), and 5 over Zoom: Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen (Netherlands), Christine Muller (USA), Rafael Shayani (Brazil), Victoria Thoresen (Norway) and Daniel Truran (Spain).

1. Opening of the General Assembly by the IEF President

Arthur Dahl opened the General Assembly at 19:00 and welcomed all the participants who attended despite the time differences in their home countries.

2. Introduction of members participating

The members present and on-line introduced themselves.

3. Approval of the officers of the General Assembly

The IEF President presided at the General Assembly. A Secretary was not needed since the session was recorded.

4. Approval of the agenda

The Agenda was approved as presented.

5. Report on the election of the Governing Board

The election of the IEF Governing Board was held by e-voting from 21 March to 4 April before the General Assembly so that the results could be announced during the meeting. Twelve members voted, but one ballot lacked enough names and was invalid. The teller reported that the Governing Board for 2019-2020 consists of Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Arthur Dahl, Christine Muller, Halldor Thorgeirsson, Laurent Mesbah, Victoria Thoresen and Wendi Momen, the same composition as last year.

6. Presentation, consultation and approval of the Annual Report 2018-2019

The President summarized the Annual Report, which was then approved with appreciation by the General Assembly.

7. Consultation on activities and priorities for the coming year

Participants had a number of suggestions for future activities.

- UNESCO and UN Environment have been developing educational materials on values and lifestyles in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, but there is a request to bring these down to the pre-school level where values and examples are already influencing future behaviour. It is important to get children outdoors and in contact with nature. IEF could consider on-line resources in support of children's classes, and games children could play. Sustainability projects could also be developed for junior youth to empower them and give them the experience of making a difference. Examples mentioned that had worked in the past were tree planting and supporting a local plastic bag ban. Schools often provide information on environmental sustainability, but no possibility to work for change and no hope for the future. More outreach is needed to young people, for example at the Townshend International School in the Czech Republic. It would also be good to involve older people who may have more time and interest than the parents of the youth.
- IEF should continue to follow international discourses and contribute to them when possible. For example members could provide perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goals on Education and Reducing Inequality at the up-coming High Level Political Forum in New York in July, either by attending programs open to the public or by creating brief videos.
- The question was discussed: How can members become more actively involved with IEF?
 - Member could write short notes/articles for the IEF Newsletter.
 - Members could create educational materials.
 - Members can help with the maintenance of the website.
 - Members can take their own initiatives to contribute to social discourse about sustainability.
 - Members can create brief videos.
 - Members can monitor issues and identify where IEF could contribute to social discourse.
 - Members can help with hosting an IEF Annual Meeting.
- The consultation on possible locations for future IEF conferences resulted in three concrete suggestions:
 - We could ask the Townshend School if they were interested in having a conference with student engagement there.
 - Africa is an important part of the world to support sustainable development. We could explore possibilities there in the future.
 - We could partner with ebbf whose conference will likely take place in Lisbon in May. Daniel Truran affirmed that such a collaboration would be very welcome. Victoria Thoresen has connections with schools for teachers close to Lisbon. If planned well in advance, we could offer something where the youth can be involved.
- It would be of advantage if IEF was registered somewhere because a legal existence could open new doors. However, we have not found a country that would register an organisation not rooted in a particular country. This may be worthwhile to pursue.
- We could share more relevant content from the IEF website and activities of IEF members on the IEF Facebook Page.

- The issue of the long term sustainability of IEF was raised. Young people could be trained in the work Arthur Dahl has been doing.

8. Other business

There was no other business.

9. Closing of the General Assembly

After thanking all the participants, the President closed the General Assembly at 20:15.

The audio recording of the General Assembly is available

at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1r9DvJXqaW1fl-QNF9CDS9xQet0GSlCj> and the video recording is at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1YeVsScGJpxCiZDqvrnm5AN1RZlfZqetg>

23rd Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum

Planetary Health and Sustainable Development

Auckland and Rotorua, Aotearoa New Zealand, 5-14 April 2019

The IEF 23rd Annual Conference in New Zealand included five interrelated events around the general theme of **Planetary Health and Sustainable Development**. These were a seminar at the Auckland University of Technology; co-sponsoring a Sub-Plenary at the World Conference on Health Promotion in Rotorua, and another presentation at the conference; a lecture-workshop at the Browns Bay Baha'i Hall in north Auckland; and a seminar at the Auckland Baha'i Centre. IEF President Arthur Dahl was also interviewed on Radio New Zealand. The IEF General Assembly was held during the conference. A number of IEF members and associates in New Zealand contributed to the conference organization, including Sylvia Aston, Lesley Bradley-Vine, Marjolein Lips-Wiersma, Nizar Mohamed and Dennis Worley, and their collaboration was greatly appreciated.

Seminar at Auckland University of Technology, 5 April 2019

Theme: **Inner Climate Change: The Transformative Power of Spiritual Worldviews for Sustainability**

This afternoon seminar was organised by IEF member Marjo Lips-Wiersma, Professor of Ethics and Sustainability Leadership at the Auckland University of Technology, with more than 40 registered participants, and consisted of short talks and group consultation.

In the opening presentation on **Linking spirituality to the Sustainable Development Goals**, IEF President Arthur Dahl introduced IEF, and then summarized the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015. The Agenda calls for a fundamental transformation in society and the economy, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defining a paradigm shift for people and planet that is inclusive and people-centred, leaving no one behind. The SDGs integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability with the participation of governments and all stakeholders.

He quoted the 2015 Summit Declaration **Transforming Our World**: "We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind." "It is "We the Peoples" who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as Parliaments, the UN system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people.... It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success." The difficulty, of course, is implementing such high aspirations, which is where ethics and spirituality are so important.

Arthur introduced the SDGs, which include goals that place humans at the centre, where environmental challenges represent threats to human health and well-being, and where environmental solutions can reinforce human progress. There are goals for environmental resources, processes and boundaries defining planetary health on which human well-being and development depend, as well as goals about transitioning to a green economy that builds rather than undermines planetary sustainability.

Sustainability requires staying within the inner and outer boundaries that determine the safe and just space for humanity. We presently face outer environmental crises, with greenhouse gas emissions and climate change both accelerating, and only one decade to change course. Planetary biodiversity is collapsing, with the loss of 80% of insects in Europe and 60% of vertebrates worldwide. We have overshoot the boundaries for global nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, are inundated with plastic pollution, toxic chemicals and nuclear waste, and see air pollution as the highest cause of mortality.

We are also not respecting the inner social boundaries, with half of world population struggling to meet basic needs, many workers and the lower middle class left behind as present globalization benefits the rich and powerful one percent, and a general failure to redistribute the wealth generated by the modern economy. The result is a rejection of elites, the rise of populism and rebellion.

This has resulted in powerful forces of disintegration. The present fragmentation and polarization threaten the global human system. Vested interests block the response to environmental threats. The economic system concentrates wealth while building a fragile bubble of debt-driven consumption. The marginalized majority is susceptible to populist, nativist political manipulation, with the rise of authoritarian and despotic governments in defence of the rich and powerful.

So how do we build countervailing forces for integration? We need ethics, values, goals and visions of a better future, with which we can build new worldviews and narratives for justice and equity, able to motivate positive action by each of us. We need to ask if spiritual worldviews can open us to change our lifestyles, using the Sustainable Development Goals as a common framework.

Arthur then provided an ethical view of the SDGs, which are ambitious even if everyone supports them. He asked what do we do with the major part of humanity that could not care less because they are greedy, corrupt, violent and selfish? An ethical approach to the SDGs can help us to understand the transformation required. For example, the Baha'i worldview is centred on the unity in diversity of all humanity, a vision shared with the SDGs. He then gave some quotes that give a Baha'i perspective on the SDGs, selected from [a compilation on the IEF web site](#).

He concluded on a note of hope. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals are motivated by justice "to leave no one behind". This is coherent with spiritual worldviews of the oneness of humankind and a higher human purpose. Such worldviews can motivate us to implement the SDGs in our lives and communities. Setting positive goals can be inspiring, and with unity of purpose we can help to build unity in the whole community.

The second presentation was on **Working with Different Spiritual Worldviews in Co-hosting the World Conference on Health Promotion in NZ** by Sione Tu'itahi, Executive Director of the Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand and Vice President, South West Pacific Region, International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE). Sione, originally from Tonga, described our disintegrating global village that needs balance and unity to be well and sustainable. He described the interdependence that is at the heart of indigenous knowledge systems, with physical and spiritual realities connected in the web of life. Spirituality complements scientific reality, with ethical principles to balance physical well-being and spiritual prosperity. Seeking planetary well-being is like navigating by the stars in Polynesian times. We need principles for governing our global village so that we can work together as one at the local, national and planetary levels for both health promotion and sustainability.

The next presentation provided a Maori perspective from the indigenous people of New Zealand, with Amber Nicholson of the Auckland University of Technology speaking on **Kaitiakitanga: More than Sustainability**. She said the place I am from is part of me. Her strong connection to place through her mother acknowledges that everything has life-forces and interconnections, with terms in Maori for both the physical body and the life-force. One's power or potentiality (*Tapu*), its actualization (*Manu*) and spiritual power or reciprocity (*Hau*), the wind, breath or spirit of life, do not die with the body. The *lo* is a spiritual realm, entity or highest knowledge that can be compared to God.

The *Hau* underpins Maori sustainability, the conduit between the spiritual and material realms, the ever-moving sustenance of life. There is an ethic of reciprocity, a vitality or aura that is more than health and well-being, aspiring to goodness. Each place has its own *Hau*, a sense of calm and place, to be left there as a legacy. There is a collective *Hau* in a group, a relational force that cannot be separated. Sustainability is protecting the life-force, the *Hau* of the environment. There is an intergenerational obligation to protect the spiritual and material well-being of resources handed down by the ancestors and to be passed on to future generations.

The final presentation by Shaun Bowler, Principal Sustainability Adviser of Enviro-mark, was on **Sustainability and Mindfulness**, how to get in touch with our body and integrate with the land that sustains us. Mindfulness means exploring the inner climate, the inner space for the new frontier, developing self-compassion as a foundation for compassion for the earth, for each other. The small self is an illusion, the big Self is consciousness. Separation of self is an artifact of our minds and is at the root of our problems, with dissociation, depersonalization, affective dysregulation, disconnecting from one's thoughts, feelings, memories, sense of identity, that can lead to denial of climate change. Indigenous knowledge is at the frontier of sustainability. The undivided self is connected to the land, the sea, and the mountains, to avoid injuring yourself. Does the climate affect our health? Our health is affecting the climate. We are not aware of our *Hau*; we need more connection to ourselves and each other. Obesity, malnutrition and climate change are the same issue. Health and well-being are at the centre of the SDGs, and mindfulness is the missing link, connecting to the higher motivation to take climate action. Metacognition is the ability to see all the connections with empathy and compassion, taking account of other people in our common humanity, aware of our choices and forming sustainable habits.

23rd IUHPE World Conference on Health Promotion

7-11 April 2019, Rotorua, Aotearoa New Zealand

The International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) organizes a world conference every three years, this year with 1,200 participants from 73 countries. The theme was **Waiora: Promoting Planetary Health and Sustainable Development for All**, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) providing the framework for the sub-themes of the conference (<http://www.iuhpe2019.com/en-gb/iuhpe-home>). The conference was remarkable for its broad perspective integrating human health with the health of the planet, sustainability, indigenous perspectives, social justice, and economic inequality, with the poor suffering the most from poor health.

One conference highlight was the remarkable series of plenary speakers. Sir Michael Marmot discussed social justice and health, noting that social injustice in the US and UK was killing on a grand scale, with poverty rising by 10 percent. People need to live lives of purpose, balance and meaning, with evidence-based policy in a spirit of social justice. Dr. Stanley Vollant, the first indigenous surgeon in Quebec, described the damage done to indigenous peoples by colonization and the uprooting of their cultures. Health determinants are more important than health care. Dr. Anne Bunde-Birouste works on sport for social change, avoiding the dangers of sports competition as big business, but using sport for youth empowerment and capacity-building for refugee and disadvantaged children. Dr. Trevor Hancock emphasized the ecological determinants of health, with the Anthropocene the greatest threat to human health in the 21st century, and the need to reduce the ecological footprint by 80% in wealthy countries. Dr. Priya Balasubramaniam reviewed the urban paradox, with mass migration to cities for a better life but ending up in slums with an urban health penalty. Dr. Colin Tukitonga, Director-General of the Pacific Community (SPC), described the ecological disaster of climate change in the

Pacific Islands and its psychosocial impacts. The island countries are at great risk, with food and water resources declining, diseases rising and the world's highest rates of obesity and diabetes. Climate change is a threat multiplier. Tomati Kruger, leader of the Maori Tuhoe people, described indigenous Maori values and their destruction during colonization. They have negotiated compensation, and the Te Urewera National Park has been returned to Maori ownership and management, but much still must be done for a people in recovery. Dame Anne Salmond referred to the outpouring of love after the recent massacre in the Christchurch mosques, and the need to build effective, accountable governance for human rights. The country is presently out of balance, with biosystems collapsing, violence, insecurity and no reciprocity. This is far from the Maori kinship with nature, generosity and respect for children. She contrasted the broad vision of scientists of Captain Cook's time with the modern categorization, separation, and quantification of reductionist science justifying colonization and white supremacy with everything privatized to make a profit. She called for a return to truth, justice and Maori values and ways of being.

Wellbeing for everyone in a challenging world: community and spiritual health promotion perspectives

IEF was a co-sponsor of the Sub-Plenary on **Well-being for everyone in a challenging world: community and spiritual health promotion perspectives** along with the Planetary Well-being Network (PWN) and the Spiritual Health Promotion Group (SHP). It was held on Wednesday afternoon, 10 April 2019, with over a hundred people attending.

The opening speaker was Prof. John Raeburn, Auckland University of Technology and founding member of the Planetary Well-being Network of NZ. He defined well-being as how we feel about our life, the opposite of stress, trauma, suffering and depression. Mental health is today the number one health problem. Planetary health addresses the connectedness of each of us to each other, similar to the Maori putting people first. It works for inclusion, diversity, equity, respect, compassion, and empowerment, addressing community, culture and ecology with a positive approach to building strength. It supports community houses as well-being centres with local participation and control, building connectedness for the well-being of the planet, community by community.

Dr. Tess Liew, PWN People Project Advisor and Board Member, and Community Development Strategic Broker for the Auckland Council, a Malaysian Chinese long resident in NZ, shared community health promotion principles, building resilience through resourceful individuals who earn trust in a supportive environment, listening to and engaging people with the mind, ears, eyes and heart.

Sione Tu'itahi, Executive Director, Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand and originally from Tonga, focussed on the spiritual dimension, saying that the island of humanity is suffering, as he learned from his grandmother to leave enough for the future up to the 10th generation. We should bring together the science-based and indigenous or spiritual knowledge systems. We are global citizens from one village. We should identify our global values and principles. Science and spirituality are two frameworks to restore balance and well-being. We should be planetary health promoters. We must live together, or we shall die together, because the Earth is one country and mankind its citizens. We must balance our excessive materialism, and eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty.

Dr. Arthur Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum spoke on **Faith, Ethics and Values in Health Promotion**. He started by describing some of the spiritual and ethical failures that have become sources of stress with its negative health impacts. These include modern lifestyles and the materialist value system of competition with winners and losers; fear for the future from such things as social fragmentation and climate change; poverty in a society of wealth; marginalization, discrimination and exclusion; isolation, loneliness and lack of community or social relations, including among the elderly; an inability to pay for basic hygiene, health care or more nutritious diets; and most fundamentally the loss of any meaning in life, direction or higher human purpose.

Faith and spirituality can contribute to address these problems. A supportive faith community can provide social support. Belief in prayer and divine assistance counters stress. Positive feelings support the immune system. A higher purpose contributes to the will to live. When work is seen as a form of worship, one wants to

be of service to society. As a Baha'i writing has put it: "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."

Contact with nature also contributes to good health. Defining the environment as separate from humanity is a recent phenomenon in Western materialist culture. Indigenous beliefs are strongly in harmony with nature, tied to the ancestors or Mother Earth. Studies show that urban inhabitants closer to parks and green spaces are healthier than those without access to greenery. Hospital patients with a view of a tree get well faster than those whose window does not overlook a tree. It is so easy to feel inspiration and upliftment from the beauty and wonder of nature. There is a deep spiritual dimension to our relationship with nature.

Beyond spirituality, strong ethics and values also support human well-being. They can provide the motivation to sacrifice superficial pleasures for higher values. One can desire to be healthy in order to serve better. A sense of solidarity with others can inspire working for poverty alleviation and economic transformation and against growing inequality. The qualities of generosity and voluntary giving are another expression of this. Reacting to the excesses of the consumer society can inspire moderation, being content with little and meeting one's needs but not to excess. Sustainable lifestyles tend to be healthier, preferring fresh local food, little or no meat, and physical exercise with more sustainable forms of transport.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also provide a framework for action that is ethically motivated. Meeting these goals will reduce many economic, social and environmental causes of bad health, while leaving no one behind.

As the Bahá'í International Community has put it "The pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness." What better way to health promotion?

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

Dr. Richard Egan, Senior Lecturer in Health Promotion at the University of Otago Medical School, NZ, a specialist on spirituality and health promotion as it relates to the dying, described recent research on the importance of spirituality to good health, with bio-psycho-social-spiritual models. As people approach death, their beliefs and values, meaning and purpose, become more important. Spirituality is a public health issue linked to other health outcomes, and needs to be included explicitly in public health planning and well-being indicators.

The discussion raised the issue of the damage religion has done, particularly to women's health and well-being, and the need to distinguish the true spirituality at the heart of all religions from the superstitions that often remained today, just as science based on reason that accepts a higher human purpose needs to be separated from materialism's narrow view of human reality. There was also the concern that medical treatment concentrating on a physical illness often forgot the soul of the patient needing the love, respect and empathy of the doctor. Spirituality should be included in clinical practice. With the diversity of approaches to spirituality, it was important not to impose a particular viewpoint from outside, but to accompany a person to reflect on and crystalize their own values. The Maori in particular had been take away from their own teachings, creating major mental health issues, and the need to revive their spirituality and to bring the balance back.

New Approaches to Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals

Arthur Dahl also presented a paper at the conference on **New approaches to governance for the Sustainable Development Goals** in a Parallel Session on Multisectoral governance at different scales on Tuesday, 9 April, in the main auditorium.

The UN 2030 Agenda including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) called for a fundamental transformation in society and the economy with a paradigm shift for people and the planet that is inclusive and people-centred, integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions, representing great challenges for governance as now practiced. The goals are to be achieved by 2030, but we are already far behind. Since the SDGs are integrated and indivisible, breaking down silos, they call for integrated forms of governance, beyond sectoral ministries, using systems approaches.

The SDGs provide an integrated framework to relate the health challenges of the 21st century to the larger issues of building a more sustainable society. Health is a precondition for or a consequence of many of the targets under the SDGs. Many risks to health must be tackled at least in part at the global level, including poverty, food security, climate change, pollution and conflict. Implementing them will require a fundamental transformation in society, including in its approaches to global governance.

This calls for new thinking about sustainable global governance. With two colleagues, Augusto Lopez-Claros and Maja Grof, we have developed proposals for *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*, with a book now in press at Cambridge University Press, for which we won the New Shape Prize of the Global Challenges Foundation in May 2018.

We propose comprehensive reforms to the United Nations to adapt it to the needs of the 21st century. These include Charter revisions to give the UN legislative, judicial and enforcement capacities in the areas of peace and security, human rights, and the global environment. We also suggest immediate reforms including a World Parliamentary Assembly, stronger scientific input and technology assessment, and an advisory role for civil society and other stakeholders. We also explore transitional steps towards implementation. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of the international system to take preventive action against many health risks, and to facilitate the response to global health emergencies, among others.

Effective governance requires legislative, executive and judicial functions at the global level, just as we naturally expect at the national level. Nations will only give up right to make war in exchange for effective mechanisms of collective security and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Such fundamental change will require the gradual development of relevant international institutions and processes, building confidence in their effectiveness in reducing national insecurity. There will need to be carefully coordinated disarmament, while building trust that justice will be done. This also means that States also have to become more trustworthy, with a collective sense of moral responsibility.

Since the Sustainable Development Goals are motivated by justice “to leave no one behind”, they need such a global governance framework with multilevel governance, both subsidiarity and global governance for global dimension of sustainability. Such governance should be participatory, inclusive, with no marginalization or exclusion. It should create a system that provides meaningful employment for everyone, eliminates poverty, achieves gender balance, reduces inequalities, and provides for the health needs of all. It should be values-based, altruistic and cooperative, emphasizing social justice, equity, solidarity and generosity.

Radio New Zealand interview 12 April 2019

Radio New Zealand interviewed IEF President Arthur Dahl about the serious state of the coral reefs of the world, suffering from climate change, ocean acidification, pollution and over-fishing. One concern was the impact of chemicals in sunscreens which have been shown to damage young corals in very low concentrations. Arthur referred to the work of IEF member Austin Bowden-Kerby in Fiji replanting corals to restore damaged reefs, and his own long-term monitoring of the decline in coral reefs.

Global Governance, Climate Change and Solutions

Lecture-workshop at Browns Bay Bahá'í Hall, 12 April 2019

About 30 people gathered at the Browns Bay Baha'i Hall in north Auckland for a lecture by Arthur Dahl on **Global Governance, Climate Change and Solutions**. Arthur summarized the latest science on climate

change and the efforts needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C. While there is much individuals and local communities can do to reduce their carbon footprint, there is also a need for binding legislation at the global level since the present voluntary commitments are insufficient to avoid catastrophic climate change. He then outlined the recent proposals he has contributed to on Global Governance for the 21st Century which would address this. A video recording of the lecture will be made available later.

This was followed by workshop discussions on the efforts each person could make to take action on climate change in their own lifestyle and community. For example, local IEF members have been early adopters of electric vehicles.

One World, One People, One Health

Seminar at Auckland Bahá'í Centre, Glen Innes, 14 April 2019

On Sunday afternoon, the Auckland Bahá'í Centre hosted a seminar on planetary health and sustainable development entitled **One World, One People, One Health**. The well-being of the planet is one of the most significant issues for humanity today. The seminar featured Baha'is who work in the field of health promotion and sustainable development. They had previously spoken in a sub-plenary at the 23rd World Conference on Health Promotion, reported on above. Mr Tu'itahi was the co-chair of the world conference held for the first time in New Zealand.

Sione Tu'itahi, Executive Director, Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand, shared his experience through **Learnings from co-hosting a world conference on planetary well-being and sustainable development**. It took three years to organize the conference, during which he learned the ethical and spiritual virtues necessary for such an effort, including purity of motive, humility, patience, moderation, focus, courage, love and compassion. You do this for the well-being of humanity, not for self-promotion. Sione came from a small village on an island of 500 inhabitants in Tonga, and was destined to follow in his grandfather's footsteps as a Methodist minister, but his vision was world-embracing and he became a Baha'i instead.

The conference focussed on the most pressing issue, climate change, which in the islands is considered a climate crisis with their ecosystems devastated. The usual scientific approach of western knowledge needed the spiritual dimension to connect the inner and outer realities, for which he organized a sub-plenary on spirituality (described above). A number of Baha'is were involved in the conference, including in the artistic performance at the opening. The conference was the first to give an equal place to indigenous knowledge and spirituality, with Maori one of four official languages and an important Maori presence in the plenaries. The conference issued both a general statement on the state of health promotion, and an indigenous statement. The feedback from participants was highly positive, so this should be continued in future conferences.

The second speaker was Dr Arthur Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum, on the topic: **Guidance for Socially- and Environmentally-coherent Action**. The presentation consisted of excerpts from recent messages from the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Baha'i Faith, containing practical advice concerning the economic, social and environmental issues facing the world at the present time. These help to put current problems into context, warn of challenges that must be faced, and explain the practical application of spiritual principles to live a life that is coherent with Baha'i spiritual and social teachings. They diagnosed the forces of disintegration and integration at work in the world, described how to rethink the economic system for justice and sustainability, called for unity of vision in responding to climate change, and gave a positive perspective on the world that can emerge when the unity of humanity is finally accepted. The compilation of texts is available on the IEF web site at <https://iefworld.org/cmepsocenv>.

Video Contribution to the Conference

IEF member Dr. Mojgan Sami from the University of California prepared an excellent short video clip on **planetary health promotion** as a contribution to our conference. The link is <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UI9ncd5pjoqzfVuLhZ4yCweTMgsVmNj8/view>.

IEF member Prof. Rafael Amaral Shayani from the Universidade de Brasília highlights the importance of spirituality for the health of the global environment in his video "**The role of spirituality in creating new social and environmental sustainability mindsets: The need of a new energy paradigm**": <https://youtu.be/GQmEQFyyCY>

UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

The IEF participated in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Geneva on 21-22 March 2019, and in the Civil Society Pre-Meeting to the Forum on 20-21 March. Both Victoria Thoresen and Arthur Dahl attended the Pre-Meeting, and Arthur was accredited for IEF as one of 800 participants in the UNECE Regional Forum.



At the Civil Society Pre-meeting in the Palais des Nations, representatives from all the major groups and other stakeholders discussed the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the role of civil society in United Nations processes on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and joint advocacy messages that they would deliver to the intergovernmental Regional Forum. Working groups considered each of the SDGs under review this year at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) next July, as well as the process of Voluntary National Reviews that governments prepare for presentation at the HLPF.

The Regional Forum consisted of plenary sessions, focus events for dialogues on pressing questions of "Technology, Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence - Curse or Blessing for Sustainable Development" and "How to Measure Progress? Data and Statistics for SDGs", and round tables on SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

One significant feature of the events was the strong predominance of women on the podium, with usually only one token man. The Chair of the Forum was Albanian Minister of Health and Social Protection Ogerta Manastirliu, who noted that more than half of their Cabinet was female. UNECE Executive Secretary Olga Algayerove was active throughout the forum. In her opening keynote, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said that we are off track in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and more ambition is needed. With the rural/urban divide and so many unemployed young, a quarter of the region's population is at risk of poverty. The gender gap remains. Greenhouse gas emissions per capita are much higher, making it harder to meet the Paris goals. She said it was our duty to the marching children to move with greater speed.

Many government delegations shared their successes and difficulties, with progress on laws and policies, but frequent failures with implementation. Having an independent ombudsman to investigate such failures was useful. Human rights mechanisms were also helpful, since the SDGs corresponded to many human rights.

In the focus event on information technology, it was noted that half the world population is not yet on line, and reaching them would require addressing affordable access, training in appropriate skills, and building trust in the system and in the information it conveys. There was potential to promote health, reduce transaction costs, and make agriculture more efficient, but a new regulatory framework founded on ethical principles was needed to catch up with the rapidly evolving technology.

The focus event on measuring progress cited advances in opening up data bases to public access, but challenges in disaggregating data to capture the poorest, the most marginalized, children, Roma, migrants and

others most often left behind. There are indicators of outcomes, but not many that measure progress to highlight where more effort is needed.

In the closing keynote, Eeva Furman of Finland gave a preview of the UN Global Sustainable Development Report to be issued on 15 May 2019, of which she is one of the principal authors. It applies systems thinking to look at SDG interactions by transnational flows. While there are many synergies between SDGs, there are also challenging trade-offs. The report will review six areas for systemic transformations: human potential and well-being, sustainable economies, energy decarbonisation and access, food and nutrition, urban and peri-urban development, and securing the global commons. It explores pathways and levers for transformation, and highlights the need for sustainability science and science capacity worldwide. This will be something to look forward to in May.

MEMBERS CORNER

IEF Member Gary Reusche invites collaboration for the production of 5-minute videos for neighbourhood discussions, firesides, and social media.

I would be happy to collaborate with anyone wishing to create a video. What would be the starting point? A script of about 500 words (1.5 pages). Then we would consult about the script and record it. I record the sound track at the studio of a friend. A high-quality clear recording is needed. The services of professional narrators can also be obtained, but at a price. Simultaneously, photos, graphics, video clips, and background music would be collected. Each item used must have “future-proof” commercial license covers so that the video can be used in social media and shared with others. I have accounts with a couple of sites where I can freely select licensed materials and use them in the video. Of course, you can use your own photos and clips and music, but the time to produce a video would be significantly increased.

As the video is assembled the draft variant would be shared with you on-line. It’s a creative process, and I seek opinions and ideas about how best to proceed during the process. I use “Final Cut Pro” on Apple computers, to compile and produce the video.

Some recent examples of videos I prepared can be seen on Facebook, YouTube, or Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/album/5634528>). They can be shared easily on various social media sites. In general, I put Russian videos on Facebook, English on YouTube, and both languages on Vimeo. Each of these channels offer different ways to share these videos.

My guidelines for initiating distinctive conversations with short videos

Less and less time is spent reading, and the more complex the subject the greater the difficulty to find the time to research and learn about subjects. Offering easy access to difficult, contentious, or complex subjects can be facilitated with a short video.

Short informative multimedia or videos can create interest and catalyze meaningful conversations in neighborhoods. Suggested parameters:

1. The video should be 4 – 5 minutes. Longer videos are less likely to be viewed in social media.
2. The video presents a subject that might be unfamiliar to the audience, or the subject matter may already be discussed in the press and social media, and preconceptions already exist. The video introduces theory, historical background, selected references, etc., on the defined subject. This helps to establish a common place for starting a discussion.
3. The narration should not be an academic lecture. The narrative text should be straight-forward, with simple logic, easy to follow, and appeal to a wide age group.
4. The use of non-Bahá’í references will target and create a common ground with like-minded individuals and groups and increase the receptivity of the message in general¹.

5. Many complex issues impact the heart, even more than the head/intellect. Heart to heart communication will increase effectiveness.
6. The video can be designed to set the theme and establish the tone of a discussion. It does not seek to suggest a conclusion for the group or any individualⁱⁱ. The video is used to initiate a discussion, expand the content and scope of the discussion, introduce ideas and references, and ask a lot of open questions to encourage discussion. Finally, the discussion can brainstorm ideas to apply what has been learned
7. The narrative text is often the hardest part of the process. A speaking rate of 150 spoken words per minute is average for voice actors. To conjure a mood, create a sense of place, or to appeal to the heart rather than the head, the reading of the text can include short breaks, faster and slower tempos, etc. The narrator should feel like s/he is shooting a film in his/her own head.
8. In addition, the video introduces graphics to reinforce the text, and sound (music). Often the graphics greatly add comprehension of complex topics, and the addition of sound creates a desired atmosphere.
9. So, realistically the script would be between 450-550 words (4-5 min video).

If you would like to get in contact with Gary Reusche, please, send an e-mail to ief@iefworld.org

General Advice for Producing Videos

The onslaught of existential issues facing the world is being ignored by large segments of society, or perhaps simply buried under a mountain of consumerism. To overcome inertia, a groundswell of activity is needed. Issues need to be understood and discussed. How is it possible to discuss issues when “facts are less important than feelings in shaping our beliefs about empirical matters...”? One possible answer: **Consider making or collaborating in the production of 5-minute videos and use them to introduce a discussion.** *In times of universal deceit, telling the truth will be a revolutionary act.* —George Orwell

Over 150 years ago Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “Whosoever they gather in their meetings let their conversation be confined to learned subjects and to information on the knowledge of the day.” In the context of the 21st century, His guidance is prophetic. But how can this be achieved, without entering into arguments, to arrive at a positive result, and engagement for change?

Consider videos by Robert Reich. These videos are driven by emotion and supported with facts. Because of the emotion, they maintain interest. Because of the facts, they are effective. He is really a master of these great videos.

1. Inequality Media; <https://youtu.be/JgPYtT7whro>
2. Everything You Need to Know About the New Economy; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMmH_2EYohQ&feature=share
3. The Monopolization of America; <https://youtu.be/KLfO-2t1qPQ>

Robert Reich probably has some graduate students to help him, plus some research grants, but for common folks like me, technology has given us opportunities too. Today with notebook computers, lots of time, a passion for creativity, and inspiration, we can all make these videos. My hope is that activists can flood social media and neighbourhood discussions with these kinds of materials and create a positive dialog and action for change. The time is short.

There are web sites that will help you create videos, for example check out biteable.com. This gives excellent advice about the process.

Some recent examples of videos I prepared can be seen on Facebook, YouTube, or Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/album/5634528>). They can be shared easily on various social media sites. In general, I put Russian videos on Facebook, English on YouTube, and both languages on Vimeo. Each of these channels offer different ways to share these videos.

Ebbf's 29th Annual Conference, 16 -19 May, Geneva Switzerland on Rethinking Materialism

During this, ebbf's 29th annual conference, we will shift the debate from the traditional materialistic concept of "stuff" and the focus on "more or less stuff." Instead we will center our attention on the means that are required for progress to occur.



What are the underlying assumptions that sustain materialism?
 How can we transition our organizations to a healthier work environment?
 How can we and our organizations reach the dynamic coherence between the material needs of any company and its sense of purpose, its spiritual essence, in order to allow ethical business, our businesses, to build the future?

For more information about the conference, go here: <http://ebbf.org/event/ebbf-29th-annual-conference-rethinking-materialism/#ebbf>

Human Rights and Environment

Arthur Lyon Dahl, (based in part on official sources)

Human rights and the environment are two of the major global issues of our time. For a long time they have been seen largely as separate concerns, each with their advocates and associations, their international conferences and institutions, and their accumulation of legal texts. Yet as environmental problems have globalized and now threaten the health and well-being of multitudes, the two issues are converging, with interests increasingly in common. It is time for the two communities to collaborate and to recognize their complementarity.

The legal basis for environmental and human rights

The most immediate point of convergence is in the increasing recognition that one essential human right is to a healthy environment that enables many other human rights. Today there is still no universally recognized human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, but we are coming close. Over a hundred countries have some legal text acknowledging environmental rights. At the global level, the evolution has been gradual.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, includes a number of rights relevant to the environment or threatened by environmental dangers, including the right to life and security of person, various economic, social and cultural rights, favourable conditions of work, a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, and the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. For a long time environmental rights have been defended by reference to these fundamental rights.

The Declaration is not a legally binding text, but in 1966, many of its provisions were incorporated into a Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and a Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the right to life, to favourable conditions of work, to the protection of family, mothers, children, and young persons,

to an adequate standard of living, and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. There is still no mention of the environment, which was only just emerging then as an issue of global concern.

The first UN text directly linking the environment and human rights was the **Stockholm Declaration** of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm (1972), which in its first paragraph proclaims: “Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights - even the right to life itself.” It was normal that the early stages of United Nations efforts to address environmental problems should relate them to human rights and dignity.

The UN **Commission on Human Rights** started to address environmental issues in 1989 through resolutions on movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes (Resolution - 1989/42). The Commission on Human Rights adopted its first resolution entitled Human rights and the environment in 1994 followed by a number of resolutions on the same subject matter in 1995 and 1996 (Res. 1994/65; Res. 1995/14; Res. 1996/13). From 2002, the Year of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Commission on Human Rights adopted resolutions on the environment that were entitled **Human rights and the environment as part of sustainable development**(Res. 2002/75; Res. 2003/71; Res. 2005/60).¹

In 2012, the Human Rights Council, the successor to the Commission on Human Rights, established a mandate on **human rights and the environment**. The Council acknowledged that all human beings depend on the environment in which we live. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. Without a healthy environment, we are unable to fulfil our aspirations or even live at a level commensurate with minimum standards of human dignity. At the same time, protecting human rights helps to protect the environment. When people are able to learn about, and participate in, the decisions that affect them, they can help to ensure that those decisions respect their need for a sustainable environment.

As the recognition of the links between human rights and the environment has increased, the number and scope of international and domestic laws, judicial decisions, and academic studies on the relationship between human rights and the environment have grown rapidly. Many States now incorporate a right to a healthy environment in their constitutions. However, the Council saw that many questions about the relationship of human rights and the environment remained unresolved and required further examination.

The Human Rights Council mandate on human rights and the environment was intended to study the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and to promote best practices relating to the use of human rights in environmental policy-making. Mr. John Knox was appointed in August 2012 to serve as the Independent Expert (2012 – 2015) and as the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment (2015 – 2018). In 2018, the Human Rights Council further extended the mandate (resolution 37/8) and appointed Mr. David. R. Boyd as the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment as of 1 August 2018.²

John Knox delivered his final report to the UN General Assembly in July 2018, entitled **Human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**.³ In it, “the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Assembly recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Drawing on the extensive experience with this right at the national and regional levels, he explains why the time has come for such recognition by the United Nations.”

In the report, he summarizes his extensive work to define obligations under human rights law to protect against environmental harm. He had collected and created a website for good practices on environmental rights (<http://environmentalrightsdatabase.org>) and another for environmental human rights defenders (www.environment-rights.org). He had prepared for the Human Rights Council reports on specific aspects of the relationship, including climate change and human rights in 2016 (A/HRC/31/52), biodiversity and human rights in 2017 (A/HRC/34/49), and children’s rights and the environment in 2018 (A/HRC/37/58). He also compiled framework principles on human rights and the environment (A/HRC/37/59), submitted to the Human Rights Council in March 2018, that reflect the application of existing human rights obligations in the environmental context.

The report proposed three options for the General Assembly to consider:

- 1) a new international treaty, such as the Global Pact for the Environment now under negotiation;
- 2) an additional protocol to an existing human rights treaty; for example, the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment could be the focus of an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- 3) the General Assembly could adopt a resolution focused on the right to a healthy environment.

Another recent significant step forward in an explicit acknowledgement of the close relationship between human rights and the environment has been the adoption by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 2018 of the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas**⁴

The Declaration includes many passages and whole articles that define environmental rights. For example, the exploitation of natural resources requires “a duly conducted social and environmental impact assessment”, the “rights to work in safe and healthy working conditions”, the “right not to use or to be exposed to hazardous substances or toxic chemicals, including agrochemicals or agricultural or industrial pollutants.” The Declaration calls for “specific criteria for the importation, classification, packaging, distribution, labelling and use of chemicals used in agriculture, and for their prohibition or restriction,” and a “system for the safe collection, recycling and disposal of chemical waste, obsolete chemicals and empty containers of chemicals so as to avoid their use for other purposes and to eliminate or minimize the risks to safety and health and to the environment.” It calls for the “right to healthy and adequate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods that respect their cultures,” and “the transition to sustainable modes of agricultural production. States shall stimulate sustainable production, including agroecological and organic production, whenever possible.” It goes beyond agriculture to consider wider environmental concerns. “States shall recognize and protect the natural commons and their related systems of collective use and management.” “States shall take measures aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of land and other natural resources used in their production, including through agroecology, and ensure the conditions for the regeneration of biological and other natural capacities and cycles.”

Article 18 covers a variety of environmental issues:

- “1. Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands, and of the resources that they use and manage.
- “2. States shall take appropriate measures to ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas enjoy, without discrimination, a safe, clean and healthy environment.
- “3. States shall comply with their respective international obligations to combat climate change. Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to contribute to the design and implementation of national and local climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, including through the use of practices and traditional knowledge.
- “4. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no hazardous material, substance or waste is stored or disposed of on the land of peasants and other people working in rural areas, and shall cooperate to address the threats to the enjoyment of their rights that result from transboundary environmental harm.
- “5. States shall protect peasants and other people working in rural areas against abuses by non-State actors, including by enforcing environmental laws that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the protection of the rights of peasants or other people working in rural areas.”

Another whole section concerns issues of patenting of genetic resources and maintains that peasants have “the right to seeds” and to maintain and preserve their own genetic varieties.

Article 20 addresses biodiversity and traditional knowledge more generally:

- “1. States shall take appropriate measures, in accordance with their relevant international obligations, to prevent the depletion and ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in order to promote and protect the full enjoyment of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.
- “2. States shall take appropriate measures to promote and protect the traditional knowledge, innovation and practices of peasants and other people working in rural areas, including traditional agrarian, pastoral, forestry, fisheries, livestock and agroecological systems relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

“3. States shall prevent risks of violation of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas arising from the development, handling, transport, use, transfer or release of any living modified organisms.”

The right to water is also defined, including “the human rights to safe and clean drinking water and to sanitation.” “States shall protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes, from overuse and contamination by harmful substances, in particular by industrial effluent and concentrated minerals and chemicals that result in slow and fast poisoning.”

This recent Declaration is perhaps the most detailed specification of human rights to the environment of any globally-applicable legal text. Alongside the Special Rapporteur’s report to the General Assembly, it is difficult to see how any reasonable obstacle should prevent the adoption of a global human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Implementing human rights and environment

It is obvious today that environmental neglect and crises such as climate change are more and more threatening to human rights. Millions of children and youth around the world are marching in the streets demanding action now to protect their future. Climate change alone is already increasing poverty and hunger and will forcibly displace hundreds of millions of people as storms, floods and droughts increase in intensity and sea levels rise. Many human rights violations today are against migrants, so massive increases can be expected if more is not done to educate the receiving communities ([Dahl 2018](#)).

Fortunately, there is already a universally-accepted plan to address all the interrelated dimensions of environment and sustainability at the global level, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted at a UN General Assembly summit in September 2015. This can be seen as a new charter for human rights and the environment, especially since it emphasizes leaving no one behind. The more those goals are implemented, the more everyone’s human rights will be respected.

More fundamentally, we need to transform everyone’s attitudes and values if we are to implement these rights at the local, national and international levels. To start with, we must all come to recognize the oneness of all humankind. We are a single species, all interrelated in one human family. It follows that every single person is a trust of the whole, and we are responsible for their dignity and well-being. The resulting feelings of solidarity and empathy will prevent us from accepting or tolerating human rights abuses as normal or justified.

With the global environmental crises upon us, we can no longer deny that we are all responsible for human rights violations through our lifestyles and consumption. Whenever we use fossil fuels or the energy derived from them, or other petroleum products such as most plastics, we are increasing the deprivation and suffering of others around the world, particularly the poor, and are degrading the environment for future generations including our own children.

It is essential that we come to understand the systemic nature of our globalized society, across all nations and peoples, and its intimate dependence on the biosphere and the natural world. We must recognize that we have upset all natural systems, from climate to biodiversity to chemical cycles, and are now responsible for managing them and restoring them. The future of our planet and its ability to support life, including our own, is now in our hands.

We can take the Sustainable Development Goals as a useful blueprint for action, and consider how we can implement them in our communities, countries and internationally. There is no single answer, as we need multiple solutions at all levels, adapted to the many different situations that people find themselves in around the world.

Individually we can reflect on how to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and to moderate our consumption patterns, being content with little, just what is required for our needs without excess. That already will reduce our impact on the environment. We can then work with others around us to build more resilient communities based on justice, equity, solidarity, empathy and generosity.

To collaborate with and learn from others, we can find organizations that share our values to participate in public discourses on these issues, whether from the human rights, environmental, nature conservation, social action, development or other perspectives.

Ultimately, of course, we also need changes at higher levels. Many environmental pressures today, and the vested interests resisting change, come from unregulated multinational corporations legally responsible only to generate profits for their shareholders, with a narrow short-term focus that declines responsibility for human welfare or the common good. We need to work for a transformation of the economic paradigm, experimenting with new economic models such as B-corps, social enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of organization to create meaningful employment, generate wealth to reduce poverty, and meet the needs of society. Finally, we need to move towards effective global governance that would permit binding legislation on human rights, including environment, and bring world society back into balance with planetary resources in an ever-advancing civilization.

1. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/HREnvironment/Pages/HRandEn...>
2. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/SREnvir...>
3. UN General Assembly A/73/188 19 July 2018
4. A/res/73/165 of 17 December 2018
5. Dahl, Arthur Lyon. 2018i. *Migration and Religion*. Paper presented at the World Conference on “Religions, Creeds and Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights”, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 June 2018. <https://iefworld.org/node/929>.

International Environment Forum Annual Report August 2018 – April 2019

This **23st Annual Report** of the International Environment Forum summarizes the events and activities from August 2018 to April 2019 between two annual General Assemblies. The General Assembly in 2019 is being held during the IEF 23rd Conference in New Zealand on Planetary Health and Sustainable Development in Auckland and Rotorua, New Zealand, 5-14 April 2019

22st IEF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 22nd General Assembly of the International Environment Forum was held over the Internet using the Zoom platform on 25 August 2018. Seven IEF members connected over Zoom.

Much of the consultation revolved around improving communications with the membership to increase their involvement in IEF. One suggestion was to produce more short video clips such as the IEF Panel on Your Smartphone at the HLPF in New York (<https://iefworld.org/conf22>). More should be collected, and featured regularly on the IEF web site.

Another discussion concerned activities at the local level in communities, which are now a priority for Baha'is. Members involved in local actions for the environment and sustainability should be invited to share their stories to inspire others to act, either in reports for the newsletter or as video clips. The IEF should consider how it can encourage more such local action, for example by providing ideas, materials and case studies.

The election of the IEF Governing Board took place by e-voting on 14-24 August 2018 before the General Assembly. The teller reported the election of Arthur Dahl, Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Christine Muller, Victoria Thoresen, Laurent Mesbah, Wendi Momen, and Michael Richards. Since Michael Richards was unable to serve, a by-election was held after the General Assembly to replace him, and Halldor Thorgeirsson was elected to the board (see the report of the election at <https://iefworld.org/node/940>). A total of 49 IEF members voted during the election, which is a sign of the good health of IEF.

The report of the General Assembly is at <https://iefworld.org/genass22>.

IEF GOVERNING BOARD

The IEF Governing Board elected Arthur Dahl as President and Christine Muller as General Secretary. The Board held two electronic meetings during the seven months covered by this report and has consulted on a variety of topics related to IEF activities, including a deeper consultation about our mission and strategic plan. The following topics have been under consideration: How can we get more members actively involved? Should we reactivate some issue monitors? How do we attract more young people? Can we produce more content on video? How can we support action at the local level (broadly speaking including national/local)? How can we best accompany our members in applying spiritual principles in their professional areas?

The Board has approved twelve new membership applications since 25 August 2018. It also searched for the 48 “lost” members for whom we don't have a valid e-mail address. We found 2 members were deceased and could reconnect with 16 members.

IEF PARTNERSHIPS AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century

A working group supported by the Global Challenges Foundation (GCF)

After the proposal on global governance prepared by IEF president Arthur Dahl, Augusto Lopez-Claros, and IEF member Maja Groff won the New Shape Prize in Stockholm on 29 May, they have set up a working group with some additional finance from the Global Challenges Foundation to develop the proposal further, adding IEF members Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Joachim Monkelbaan to the group along with others. IEF is hosting a web page for the group on its web site at <https://iefworld.org/governanceWG> until they are able to design and launch their own site. They were invited by the BIC Office at the United Nations in New York to present their proposals to senior UN officials and diplomats on 5 November (see report at <https://iefworld.org/node/952>). The working group met in Paris on 9-10 November and then participated in the Paris Peace Forum on 11-13 November (see report at <https://iefworld.org/node/955>) where they also had two meetings at the National Baha'i Centre in Paris and spoke to a hundred students at Sciences Po, a leading French university. Arthur Dahl then went to London to speak on the same topic at a luncheon on 14 November at the British Parliament in commemoration of interfaith week and the twin anniversaries of the birth of the founders of the Baha'i Faith, organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Baha'i Faith, with Members of Parliament, religious leaders and other dignitaries in attendance. This was followed by an evening meeting for youth at the United Kingdom National Baha'i Centre.

Working group members joined with another GCF working group on the Common Home of Humanity (<http://www.commonhomeofhumanity.org>) in Porto, Portugal, on 1-3 February 2019 for joint discussions.

On 15 February 2019 in Stockholm, the working group defended selected modules based on its proposals before a panel of expert outside reviewers convened by the Global Challenges Foundation.

They delivered the manuscript for their book-length proposal on Global Governance to Cambridge University Press on 28 February 2019.

Talanoa Call for Action

In the Pacific tradition of Talanoa, the world came together this past year to share experiences and help make wise decisions to inspire a global response to the threat of a changing climate. People shared stories of the widespread devastation already inflicted on their communities by climate change, and the increasing risks for human and food security. They also shared stories of ambitious action already being taken all over the world in response to these threats.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) launched a Talanoa Dialogue a year ago to share positive stories and to build commitment to more action on climate change under the Convention. IEF participated in this Dialogue, first with a written submission, then with two IEF members,

Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Arthur Dahl, contributing to the May dialogue with diplomats in Bonn, Germany. Sylvia also participated in the Ministerial level Talanoa Dialogue at COP24 in Katowice, Poland, on 11 December 2018. In December, the IEF board decided to join the Talanoa Call for Action as an organization. In the December issue of LEAVES, IEF has encouraged its members to individually support this Call for Action. For more on the Talanoa Call for Action, see <https://iefworld.org/Talanoa3>.

Partnership for Education and research about Responsible Living (PERL)

After the close partnership with PERL in a joint event at the UN High Level Political Forum in New York last July (<https://iefworld.org/conf22>), our next specific collaboration was at the UN Economic Commission for Europe Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Geneva and its Civil Society pre-meeting on 20-22 March 2019.

ebbf

Our close partnership with our sister Baha'i-inspired organization ebbf – Ethical Business Building the Future continued, since IEF board members Wendi Momen and Arthur Dahl are also on the Governing Board of ebbf. Some IEF members participated in the ebbf Autumn retreat at Acuto, Italy, in October 2018. ebbf has a major focus on ethical values for sustainability, and its next conference in May in Geneva will be on “beyond materialism.”

Living the Change

Living the Change is a program of GreenFaith. Its mission is to encourage sustainable living by people of faith all over the world. IEF member Christine Muller in association with the US Baha'i Office of Public Affairs has begun a collaboration with them. The first result was that Living the Change added Baha'i content on its website. Carolyn Bader, the executive director of Living the Change introduced the initiative to the participants of the recent Wilmette Institute course on Sustainable Development during a Zoom course meeting. Living the Change is interested in collaboration with IEF and National Baha'i institutions, especially from those countries with a high carbon footprint.

ECPD

Building on our 10 year collaboration with the European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD) at the University for Peace established by the United Nations in Belgrade, Serbia, Arthur Dahl was asked to prepare the concept note for and to serve as rapporteur of their 14th international conference "A New Concept of Human Security" at the Belgrade City Hall, on 26 October 2018, as well as to chair their Youth Forum on 27-28 October (see report at <https://iefworld.org/node/954>).

IEF INVOLVEMENT IN COURSES

Wilmette Institute

Several IEF members are faculty for on-line courses at the Wilmette Institute (<http://wilmetteinstitute.org>):

Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of Humankind from 1 September to 19 October 2018. This is the seventh time since 2009 that this course has been offered, now on an annual basis. Faculty include IEF members Arthur Dahl, Christine Muller and Laurent Mesbah.

Bahá'í Perspectives on Agriculture and Food, 20 January – 9 March, 2019. Faculty include IEF members Paul Hanley, Arthur Dahl and Robert White.

BIHE

The Baha'i Institute of Higher Education has asked IEF members Arthur Dahl, Nizar Mohamed, and Laurent Mesbah to design the first courses in a new Masters programme on Applied Environmental Sciences, starting in April 2019. Teaching materials first developed by IEF are contributing to these courses.

IEF MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN OTHER EVENTS

On 5-9 September, Arthur Dahl participated in another of the annual gatherings on everyday spirituality at the Domaine de la Garde near Bourg-en-Bresse, France, that bring together representatives of many spiritual and artistic traditions. The theme this year was everyday spirituality and our economic behaviour, explored from many angles. Arthur presented on “rethinking business and the economy based on spiritual principles”, drawing on the 2 April 2010 and 1 March 2017 messages from the Universal House of Justice and other Bahá’í texts.

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS BY IEF MEMBERS

IEF member Iko Congo has submitted his MSc thesis on “Rethinking management: a case of bahá’í practitioners” which proposes that, if we are to address climate change effectively, a new way of thinking is required in order to transform how our organisations are governed and our economic system structured. His thesis was awarded as best among all those in his MSc promotion at Lancaster University, UK.

IEF member Joachim Monkelbaan published his book on Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals - Exploring an Integrative Framework of Theories, Tools, and Competencies (Springer, link: <https://www.springer.com/us/book/9789811304743>). This book provides a detailed description of the principles and methods for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including sustainability performance evaluation in companies and local governments.

IEF Newsletter

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Cynthia Diessner and Michael Richards, the IEF was able to send out its newsletter LEAVES every month.

For the December issue, the IEF received permission to publish a document which future historians may likely find significant: the January 2018 affidavit of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the US in support of the decision of federal district court Judge Anne Aiken in the Juliana vs the United States case, in which a group of youth have sued the United States Government for not taking sufficient action to address climate change that threatens their future. So far this document does not seem to be published anywhere else.

IEF Members contributed to the newsletter in several ways. Some members wrote book reviews or reports, for example IEF member David Menham wrote a summary of the report by the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) on Time Bomb Climate Change - What Role for Ecotaxes? Environmental taxes and their application in developing countries. And Carol Curtis on Majuro, Marshall Islands shared her concerns about their “literal” Mountain of Garbage, Ocean Pollution and Sea Level Rise.

CONCLUSIONS

This has been a short year with only seven months between General Assemblies. A major initiative has been the involvement of a number of IEF members in efforts to rethink global governance for the 21st century to respond to pressing environmental and sustainability challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss, among others. Members are also heavily involved in on-line educational activities. We continue to engage with United Nations processes and to partner with like-minded organizations. Through the regular newsletter, and resources available on the web site, we try to accompany our members in their efforts to transform society through the combination of scientific and spiritual approaches, the mind and the heart. Our impact can only come through the active engagement of our members, and we deeply appreciate everyone’s efforts to struggle against the forces of disorder and confusion, and to build a vision of shared identity and common purpose leading humanity towards peace and unity in harmony with the natural world that sustains us.

IEF MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

Updated March 2019

Full members

418 members in 76 countries (up from 408 in August 2018)

Albania 1 * Angola 1 * Argentina 2 * Australia 20 * Austria 1 * Bangladesh 2 * Belgium 4 * Bolivia 4 * Bosnia and Herzegovina 1 * Brazil 2 * Brunei Darrussalam 1 * Bulgaria 2 * Cambodia 1 * Cameroon 2 * Canada 40 * Chile 1 * China 2 * Colombia 3 * Congo, Democratic Republic 3 * Costa Rica 1 * Czech Republic 3 * Denmark 1 * Ecuador 2 * Eritrea 1 * Ethiopia 1 * Fiji 1 * Finland 1 * France 9 * Germany 10 * Ghana 2 * Greece 1 * Guyana 2 * Honduras 1 * Hong Kong, China 2 * Hungary 2 * Iceland 1 * India 13 * Indonesia 1 * Iran 1 * Israel 2 * Japan 1 * Kazakhstan 1 * Kenya 4 * Liberia 1 * Malawi 2 * Malaysia 6 * Marshall Islands 1 * Namibia 1 * The Netherlands 14 * New Zealand 10 * North Macedonia 1 * Norway 3 * Pakistan 3 * Philippines 2 * Poland 1 * Portugal 2 * Serbia 1 * Singapore 2 * Slovak Republic 2 * South Africa 5 * Spain 3 * Suriname 1 * Swaziland 2 * Sweden 4 * Switzerland 8 * Tanzania 1 * Thailand 2 * Togo 1 * Tonga 1 * Uganda 1 * United Kingdom 49 * United States of America 127 * Vanuatu 1 * Zambia 1 * Zimbabwe 1

Associate members

59 Associates in 17 countries

Australia 2 * Canada 6 * Chile 1 * China 1 * Czech Republic 1 * Finland 1 * France 2 * Ghana 1 * Iceland 1 * Lithuania 1 * New Zealand 2 * Pakistan 2 * Portugal 2 * Switzerland 3 * The Netherlands 5 * USA 22 * United Kingdom 6

Humanity

Humanity is an attitude of caring and mercy toward all people. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. We all suffer and rejoice. Although in the eternal scheme of life, each of us is small, we are one of a kind, irreplaceable. We lose our humanity whenever we generalize about a group of people and separate ourselves from them because of external characteristics such as race or sex. We tap into our humanity when we put ourselves in others' shoes and are genuinely concerned for their welfare. Our humanity grows as we serve others. There is no "they", only "us".

The Virtues Project™

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

The Practice of Humanity

- I feel a common bond with all people.
- I value each person as an individual.
- I refrain from prejudice.
- I feel empathy for the suffering of others.
- I have a passion for compassion.
- I offer humanitarian service.

*I am thankful for the gift of Humanity
It connects me to all people.*

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