



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
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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.

Members Corner

IEF General Assembly, 25 September 2022

The 26th IEF General Assembly will be held on Sunday, 25 September 2022 at 1pm EDT / 19:00 CEST. The election of the IEF Governing Board for 2022-2023 will take place by e-mail.

All members should have received an email invitation with detailed information about registering for the General Assembly and with voting instructions.

If you are a member and have not received an email invitation, please, contact the IEF Secretariat at ief@iefworld.org. Please, note that associates do not participate in the election of the IEF board.

We hope that many of you will be able to attend!

The IEF warmly welcomes the following new members and associates:

Members

Andreas Galsterer, Portugal
 Kate Gieger, USA
 Steve Bosserman, USA
 Leslie Cole, Canada

Associates

Oluwagbeminiyi Olaonipekun, Nigeria
 Jahangir Cyrus, USA
 Jos Hazebroek, The Netherlands
 Ezekiel Tosin Babatunde, Nigeria
 Rajendra Prasad N.R., India
 Santosh Kumar Mishra, India

IEF Webinars

The next two IEF webinars will contribute to the topics of the upcoming UN conferences:

Nov. 5 – Climate Change and COP27, with Halldór Thorgeirsson

Dec. 3 – CBD COP15: Countries are preparing new global goals to protect Nature – what do they mean and what is our role in achieving them? with Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen

Study of One Planet, One Habitation - A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World

The IEF Governing Board recommends the study of this statement by the Bahá'í International Community to all IEF members and associates. The statement is available for download in a [beautiful PDF](#) version as well as in a [text version](#) that is more suitable for study.

The IEF has also prepared a version of the statement in a simplified language accessible to older children and junior youth, in presentations as a series of seven classes illustrated with pictures of the beauty of nature, available [here](#).

IEF Endorsement of the Open Letter to World Leaders by Action for Sustainable Development

The IEF Board decided to endorse the open letter to world leaders by [Action for Sustainable Development](#) for the Global Week of Action to Act4SDGs (16-25 September). The text of the letter is printed further below and is available [here](#).

Interview with IEF Member Michael Semple

IEF: Hello Mike, we are happy that you agreed to be briefly interviewed for our newsletter. Would you, please, introduce yourself to our readers?

M.S: My name is Michael Semple. I live in Switzerland and have previously lived in Sweden, the United Kingdom and Israel. I am married, have three grown-up children and one grandchild. I studied physics at university, but spent most of my career in the field of Information Technology, specifically with Enterprise Software (SAP) in large multinationals.

IEF: You provided a major service to the International Environment Forum. Would you, please, explain to our readers what you have done?

M.S: In February I was approached by the Secretary of the International Environment Forum who asked if I would be willing to advise the IEF regarding its membership database. The processes to manage the membership were complex and time consuming and there were security concerns. I was unsure whether I could really be of assistance, since I did not know anything about Content Management Systems like Drupal, on which the Web site runs, but I was willing to give it a try.

I spent about a month looking for free alternative membership databases and trying a few Google spreadsheet and forms-based ideas, while in parallel trying to install Drupal and the underlying MySQL database at home in a virtualization platform (Docker) so that I could play around and learn about it without risk to the IEF Web site itself.

After a few frustrations with alternative solutions and learning more about Drupal and the processes in place, I realized that it would be better to use the existing system more effectively as a "single-source of the truth" for membership information. This would require "cleaning up" the current database. I set about doing this manually, since I did not have the experience required to do it programmatically (in PHP), but I was guided by an earlier analysis provided by a Drupal specialist. I learnt a lot by doing, and my confidence gradually increased.

After about two or three intensive months, guided through regular consultation with the IEF Secretary and sometimes the IEF President, the processes could be simplified so that membership data did not need to be maintained manually in multiple places, and one could rely on extracts provided by the Web site's system to persons with the appropriate level of access. There are still a few things to be evaluated in the search for continuous improvement, but they are less urgent.

My IT experience certainly helped, but I learnt a lot and enjoyed this aspect greatly.

IEF: Are you able to estimate the time you had spent for this enormous work?

M.S: I probably spent an accumulated total of about two or three months full-time equivalent.

IEF: What motivated you to have such dedication?

M.S: I cannot remember when I first became conscious of environmental issues, biodiversity loss or climate change, but when I attended the Wilmette Institute course on Sustainable Development and Human Prosperity in 2020 it was a step-change for me, and I followed the work of the International Environment Forum with greater interest and admiration. So when I was proposed this avenue of service, combining it with my personal interest in all things IT, I was very motivated. I was kept motivated by witnessing gradual improvements, and through the kind encouragement of the IEF Board Members who accompanied me during this time.

IEF: We thank you very much, Mike, for telling us about your valuable work all done behind the scenes. We are immensely grateful for your professional service to the International Environment Forum!

Preparing for Public Discourse

Materials for individual or group study

While the IEF as an organization focuses on public discourse on the international level, it encourages its members and associates to take personal initiative for public discourse on the local and national level.

Public discourse refers to presenting ideas, concepts, principles, values and other kinds of knowledge and information to others, whether in a meaningful conversation with an individual, a group discussion or meeting, a more public platform or event, at a conference, in social media or in publications. It is open to everyone, and is complementary to social action, through which your deeds should be coherent with your words.

One of the main purposes of the International Environment Forum is to contribute to public discourse relevant to the environment and sustainability, in particular by providing perspectives inspired by the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings and community experience. The IEF website is full of examples of public discourse in its conferences, statements and newsletters, and it provides many resources that you can use to prepare yourself for public discourse.

Given the importance for everyone to participate in public discourse, building this capacity is one way for the IEF to fulfil its mission. We have added to the educational materials on the e-learning section of this website a set of five presentations to help you to prepare for public discourse, both concerning the methods and content, with a focus on the environmental, social and economic dimensions relevant to sustainability, the need for global governance, and how to start in your local community.

You can find these materials [here](#).

Global Solidarity Conversations and Accounting

A Community Approach

Recent efforts to think about the well-being of humans and nature in other than financial terms (see the [accounting page](#)) suggest new ways to help local communities read their local reality and consult on possible social actions. The approach is not to suggest solutions, but to help to ask the right questions about the challenges we all face in a world materially united but socially and spiritually divided.

Here you can read an **overview** of this new initiative: https://iefworld.org/accounting_community

Here you can download the **materials** for the Global Solidarity Conversations:

[Basic Introduction](#)

[Part 1: Assessment of Reality - Questions for Local Community Assessment](#)

[Part 2: Consulting and Deciding about Actions](#)

Download Introduction, Parts 1 and 2 as [pdf](#)

[Background](#)

We invite you to consider sharing this with your own community.

Thoughts on the Harmony of Science and Religion

By Michael Moum

One of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith is that science and religion are in harmony, meaning that they do not contradict each other and present complementary aspects of creation. There are two kinds of science: material and spiritual. The former discovers material realities; the latter discovers spiritual realities. Both are necessary. 'Abdu'l-Baha defines both religion and science as "...consisting of the necessary relationships deriving from the realities of things." Thus the Baha'i teachings are concerned with how the different aspects of creation relate to each other.

There is a hierarchy of levels of creation: the first is the Primal Will or Logos or Word, which emanates from God and from which all of spiritual and material creation proceeds. The next levels are spiritual reality (the heavenly spirit), the rational soul (the human spirit), the animal spirit, vegetable spirit, and mineral spirit. Each lower level of spirit contains fewer of the attributes of God than the one above it, and exhibits a lesser degree of consciousness. The mineral, vegetable, and animal levels are the object of study of material science, while religion addresses the human spirit, heavenly spirit, and the Word. A level of spirit can discover the realities of lower levels, but cannot fully comprehend the realities of higher levels. Hence the domain of science is the material world, and the domain of religion is the spiritual worlds.

Both science and religion share the conviction that the world is orderly, and provide explanations based on that belief. They differ in that science is concerned with the causes of things, while religion is concerned with the meaning and purpose of those things. Holmes Ralston III, Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University, states that "Science holds that causality runs deep in the nature of things; religion holds that what is highest in value runs deepest in the nature of things." One might say then that material science is concerned with how things happen, and religion is concerned with why things happen. In order to most fully understand a thing, we need to know what its material and efficient causes are (the scientific aspect), and also to understand what its final and formal causes are (the religious aspect). Both are necessary, but either one alone without the other is not sufficient.

Considering evolution, for example, material science can tell us how biological entities evolve, but not whether evolution is meaningful and purposeful. Religion, on the other hand, can tell us whether evolution has meaning and purpose, but cannot tell us about the mechanisms by which evolution happens. The same comments apply to the universe as a whole: cosmology can tell us how the universe develops, but it can't answer questions of its meaning and purpose. Religion can address meaning and purpose, but not how the universe evolved from its initial beginning.

From these considerations, it is clear that science and religion, properly understood, are complementary and harmonious.

This is a shortened version of this article. To read the full three pages, go here: <https://iefworld.org/dmoum22>

Open Letter to World Leaders by Action for Sustainable Development

TIME IS NOW: ACT FOR PEACE, CLIMATE AND JUSTICE

Progress on the 2030 agenda is under threat. In 2022, the world is not working for most people and our planet. Human rights are being ignored and millions of people are being left behind, while a few become ever richer and more powerful.

The war in Ukraine together with other ongoing conflicts has led to a massive increase in the number of people facing acute food insecurity, with rising food prices making life even harder for billions of people.

At the same time, climate change presents a long-term threat to our shared home on this earth, with temperatures continuing to rise and extreme weather events devastating communities at the frontlines.

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed humanity's resilience to the limit and continues to have vast impacts on the lives of people and the wider social, economic and environmental fabric of our world. Hundreds of millions of people lost their jobs and income and were pushed into poverty.

These events have shone a glaring light on the persistent and underlying injustices and inequalities of our societies.

We need to transform a system that is no longer fit for purpose, flip the script and re-imagine our planet as our shared home, respecting the rights of all people and the natural world.

The recovery must leave no one behind... there is still time to deliver sustainable development within the Decade of Action... if leaders in each country act for Peace, Climate & Justice.

Peace

Now is the time to step back from armed conflicts, militarism must be reduced around the world:

The war in Ukraine comes in a human context where armed conflict, violence in all its forms, authoritarianism, corruption and indiscriminate repression affects the lives of millions of people around the globe and violates the human rights of people – young and old – in countries including Myanmar, Yemen, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Colombia, Brazil, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El

Salvador and others. All lives affected by conflict are of equal value. Wars and conflicts are one of the major factors leading to increasing poverty in the world.

- We call for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine – a ceasefire and a withdrawal of Russian forces, and the phased removal of all sanctions according to an agreed timeline.
- We call on third parties to prevent a further military escalation of the conflict and help in facilitating peace negotiations.
- We call for the same level of support to end all conflicts – and ensure financial support for displaced peoples and refugees.
- We further call for a global commitment from states to reduce military expenditures and to shift these funds to address the shortfall in financing for the achievement of Agenda 2030 commitments, such as on social protection and clean energy.

Climate

We call for an end to the fossil fuel era – stop financing of coal by the end of 2022 and shift funding towards clean and green R&D, fully address loss and damages from climate impacts, and solutions that provide quality jobs to power the future ethically and sustainably.

- Deliver on the Paris Agreement goal to limit mean global temperature rise to 1.5C.
- Commit to science-based national targets and a net-zero emissions economy by 2050 with ambitious climate action plans in place in each country.
- Deliver the funding promised with non-debt creating climate finance for adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage, including the unmet \$100 billion/year pledge.
- Protect the ecosystems on which all life depends by strengthening international environmental law and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030; and develop ecological strategy policies aligning with poverty alleviation, human rights, and fair economic policies.

Social Justice

Poverty and inequality are once again on the rise in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many countries, people are being pushed back into increasingly fragile situations, with the critical gaps in healthcare and loss of livelihoods being compounded by the lack of sufficient support from governments and international partners.

- Put in place a 'Vaccines for all global roadmap', donor countries must agree to finalise a temporary waiver of intellectual property protections on all Covid-19 technologies in 2022.
- We call on all governments to ensure universal social protection for all including provision of free universal healthcare to ensure everyone on earth has access to free, public, high quality health care across the life course and promote wellbeing for all ages.
- We further call for respect for fundamental rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Stop persecution of civil society activists and guarantee people's fundamental freedoms to speak out and assemble.

Economic Justice

We call for an end of austerity and a major economic stimulus that radically reduces inequality, gender inequalities and lays the foundations for a just, equal and sustainable economy.

- Keep your promises to finance a more just and sustainable future with clear commitments to 0.7% of GDP for development cooperation including at least \$50 billion/year for health and social protection
- Deliver extensive debt cancellations and create a sovereign debt workout mechanism at the UN; increase access to capital for low and middle income countries by re-allocating new Special Drawing Rights.
- Ensure everyone contributes by taxing companies and individuals fairly with progressive tax systems and ending illicit financial flows and tax evasion.
- Target financial support to reach those who most need it, by prioritising funds for women, disadvantaged minorities, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants and other most affected groups.

Green nature is good for you, blue is better

By IEF President Arthur Dahl

"The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies."

(Bahá'u'lláh)

It has long been known that contact with nature is good for our mental and physical health. Recent studies are providing more precise guidance. People who live in or move to greener areas have better mental health. Beyond happiness and well-being, this can improve attention, creativity, memory and even sleep. Nature provides involuntary stimuli, giving voluntary attention a chance to rest and recover. The health benefits of nature start at two hours a week and level off at 5 hours a week. This can be divided into amounts of a least 10 minutes each. The benefits are stronger if you feel a connection with nature, perhaps through gardening, photography or spotting wildlife. Contact with nature should be a free choice, and not under pressure or a doctor's orders. The quality of nature is important, such as really wild places or those enclosed providing a sense of security.

What is new is that marine and coastal areas (blue spaces) are twice as beneficial as green spaces such as mountains, forests, parks or even freshwater. The best is where both meet. This can even reduce some of the mental health inequalities driven by socio-economic differences, for instance in poor people living by the sea. The coast can have more patterns of change with tides, waves, sound and light than a park or forest, and opportunities to play in the sand or swim, building strong positive social experiences. Children with these experiences may have better mental health as adults. Ancient peoples often spent time in and near the water.

The strongest predictor of good mental health was not proximity or time spent in nature, but psychological connectedness to it, and this can be cultivated. Even looking at pictures of nature or watching nature documentaries can have some effect, increasing positivity and reducing boredom.

Source: Based on Catherine de Lange (2022), Into the blue, *New Scientist* No. 3395, pp. 39-41, 16 July 2022.

Climate Change and Human Rights

A new Report by the United Nations

Source: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/climate-change-and-human-rights>
You can download the report directly [here](#).

Foreword by Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to human rights of our generation, posing a serious risk to the fundamental rights to life, health, food and an adequate standard of living of individuals and communities across the world. This report aims to support government and private decision makers by assessing the relationship between climate change and human rights law.

While the United Nations and national governments acknowledge that climate change and the responses to it can impact on human rights, there is less agreement on the corresponding obligations of governments and private actors to address this problem. The relationship between human rights and the environment has been much debated over the past few decades, supported by UNEP, OHCHR and the Human Rights Council-appointed Special Rapporteur, specifically the identification of positive, mutually reinforcing links between the fields of law and policy.

This UNEP report sheds light on the human rights obligations of both governments and private actors in responding to climate change, including those relating to rights to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice, as well as obligations relating to adaptation and mitigation.

The report makes a number of recommendations on how governments and other actors may address climate change. These include the need to recognize the link between climate change and human rights in climate-related processes and activities. The report also highlights the need for greater ambition with regard to mitigation, human rights safeguards for international climate finance mechanisms, financial assistance for developing countries faced with adaptation, and the development of an international mechanism on climate-induced displacement and migration. In addition, the report proposes a number of new human rights-related mechanisms for international coordination and accountability in delivering these outcomes.

The Paris agreement is a stepping stone rather than the end objective for climate change action. So I hope that, whatever the outcome, this report will become a central reference for anybody involved in making climate or environmental related decisions in the crucial years ahead.

Addressing the disproportionate impact of climate crisis on women

BIC ADDIS ABABA — A recent forum held by the Addis Ababa Office of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) explored the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women, emphasizing the principle of equality of women and men as essential to addressing climate change.

“Climate change is largely acknowledged as an amplifier of existing socio-economic inequities, including gender inequalities,” said Atieno Mboya, professor of International Environment Law and Gender at Emory University and member of the Bahá'í community.

“While legislative and legal processes are critical in

promoting gender equality, the bigger issue is one of ontology and how we see ourselves as human beings,” said Dr. Mboya, as she explained that environmental degradation is an outcome of a purely materialistic approach to life without considering social, moral, and spiritual implications.

“How do we see ourselves as human beings? What is our reality? Are we just material, self-interested beings?” asks Dr. Mboya.

“We have a spiritual reality, a soul that has no gender. Operating in the world from this standpoint can enable us to adopt new values, new social norms, and new institutional arrangements that

promote gender equality and harmony with nature,” she said, referring to the Bahá’í teachings on the advancement of civilization.

In this light, participants examined how climate-related issues, such as disruptions to food security caused by changes in rainfall patterns and migration brought about by environmental degradation, tend to affect women more than men.

Dr. Mboya explained how, for instance, the migration of men from rural areas in order to support their families places greater labor demands on women.

“This means that there is increased pressure on women’s time,” she said. “There is reduced time for childcare and food preparation. Girls’ schooling can also be interrupted when they help their mothers.”

Even when migration is not a factor, climate change still has a greater impact on women than on men because of gender inequities, such as reduced work opportunities for women defined by their economic status and societal norms.

Despite these struggles, women in Africa are at the forefront of climate action, participants noted.

“We’re doing so much. We’re not waiting... for somebody to come and save us,” said Musonda Mumba, Director for the Rome Centre for

Sustainable Development of the United Nations Development Programme.

Dr. Mumba spoke about a new network of women environmentalists in the Sahel region, Mali, and Southern Africa, which coordinates grassroots climate action across these regions. This initiative, she said, is an example of the countless actions taken by women in Africa to mitigate environmental challenges.

In further comments, Dr. Mboya emphasized that climate change issues need to be addressed by new approaches and patterns of community life “capable of unlocking human capacity for promoting social progress.” She added that this calls for humility on our part as human beings when we interact with nature, if we are to mitigate environmental degradation.

This forum took place as part of a series of discussions being held by the Addis Ababa Office in the lead-up to the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP27, and is part of the BIC’s contribution to the discourses on climate change and the equality of women and men.

Source: Baha’i World News Service
<https://news.bahai.org/story/1614/>

Young people call for intergenerational solidarity on the climate crisis

Young people bear a disproportionate burden of the environmental crises the world faces today, which will impact their future. Research shows that many young people feel frustrated and unheard, creating a sense of unfairness that has, in recent years, fueled a surge of climate activism led by youth.

According to a recent [study](#), children born in 2020 will experience a two to seven-fold increase in extreme climate events, particularly heatwaves, compared to people born in 1960. The study finds there is "a severe threat to the safety of young generations" and calls for "drastic emission reductions to safeguard their future."

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs research shows that there are about [1.2 billion youth aged 15 to 24](#) in the world today. This is a huge percentage of the global population whose interests and voices have traditionally been overlooked.

This year's [International Youth Day](#) on 12 August will highlight the potential of Intergenerational Solidarity in advancing the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) in line with the UN Secretary-General's report on [Our Common Agenda](#). The report calls on policymakers to listen to and work with youth.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) recognizes the important role young people play in every environmental issue facing the world today. UNEP has helped establish [The Global Youth for Environment](#), which brings together young people from around the world and inspires them to take action locally, nationally and internationally towards environmental conservation and environmental governance based on the interest of youth.

"Young people have helped reshape the global climate debate because they know that they'll be the ones that could inherit a broken planet," said Sam Barratt, Chief of the Youth, Education and Advocacy unit in UNEP

Many young activists have highlighted that all too often, policymakers and government officials publicly support youth leaders and give them a seat at the table at prestigious international conferences, says Barratt. But away from the cameras, when important policies that affect young people are being made, their voices and interests are often not taken into account.

Youth activists say that they want [more than lip service from global leaders](#). They want more inclusive policymaking processes and a seat at the decision-making table.

At the recent [Stockholm+50 Youth Assembly](#), young people called for the mainstreaming of youth engagement in environmental and multilateral processes on the road to the UN Climate Change Conference in Egypt ([COP 27](#)).

"Change is coming," [said](#) UN Youth Envoy [Jayathma Wickramanayake](#). "We will continue to fight for our [youth] voices to be heard at the decision-making table."

Over the years, multiple international declarations and covenants have called for inclusive policymaking, including recommendations for accelerating action towards a healthy planet for the prosperity of all, as set out in [Stockholm+50 Agenda for Action, Renewal and Trust – Outputs and outcomes](#).

Recognizing intergenerational responsibility is a cornerstone of sound policymaking and puts front and center the critical role of young people in climate action and the need to build the capacity of young people to engage with global leaders and financial institutions.

To promote intergenerational solidarity, among other activities, UNEP has been working with the World Bank's [Connect4Climate initiative](#) to launch a series of [YouTube videos](#) that foster intergenerational dialogue.

The videos feature advocates of climate action of all ages and backgrounds to exchange ideas and experiences and build solidarity.

The [last episode](#), to be broadcast on International Youth Day, features Aldo Manos, 89, a former senior staff member of the UN, and Emmanuela Shinta, 29, an environmental film-maker and indigenous people's representative from Kalimantan, Indonesia. They discuss the climate crisis, sustainable lifestyles, the value of nature, environmental education, and the need for a shift in global mindset to protect and restore the web of life.

[60 million jobs that will be created by the green economy in 30 years do not even exist yet.](#)

UNEP and partners are also working with [higher education and youth networks](#) from around the world, by mainstreaming environmental education and awareness across curricula to equip young people with the tools and skills they need today, for the jobs of the future green economy we want.

"Intergenerational responsibility is ultimately about ethical and moral fairness," said Barratt.

"Future generations who are likely to face more frequent and intense extreme weather events have come into focus due to the fierce and effective advocacy of young climate activists. It's now time to meaningfully engage our youth – providing them with not only a seat at decision-making tables, but also the skills and capacity to effectively operate at these tables."

[International Youth Day](#) is commemorated every year on 12 August, bringing youth issues to the attention of the international community and celebrating the potential of youth as partners in today's global society. Youth are central in achieving a more sustainable and healthier planet. UNEP is committed to promoting the [work of young people](#) around the globe for the environment and providing safe and open platforms to support interaction with decision-makers.

Source: *UN Environment* <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/young-people-call-intergenerational-solidarity-climate-crisis>