

One Planet, One Habitation

A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World

A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community

June 2022

Part 3 of 4

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TRUSTEESHIP OF THE NATURAL WORLD

One people in one global homeland

**EMPOWERING PROTAGONISTS OF
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE**

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PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

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RETHINKING ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS

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Aligning with higher principles

Humanity's existence is governed not only by physical forces, but also by social and moral laws of cause and effect.

Greed is inherently corrosive to the common good, no matter how artfully justified or concealed.

Acts of selfless compassion invariably hold the power to motivate and inspire, no matter how seemingly simple or isolated.

(One Planet – One Habitation §24)

Aligning with higher principles

From this perspective, the path to a more harmonious relationship with nature cannot be one of technological adjustment alone.

It must also involve communities and societies learning to align themselves with higher principles.

(One Planet – One Habitation §25)

Aligning with higher principles

Unlocking the high-minded qualities latent in every individual has been a central concern of religious teachings and ideals for millennia.

That fanaticism and sectarian dogmatism have undermined the moral and ethical imperatives that lie at the heart of so many faith traditions can hardly be denied.

Nevertheless, communities that are actively laboring to put transcendent values into practice, for the betterment of all, represent a reservoir of experience worthy of serious consideration.

(One Planet – One Habitation §26)

Aligning with higher principles

“Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches,” asserts Bahá’u’lláh, providing one example, among many, of an approach to personal identity and collective interaction that is grounded in values transcending material prosperity alone.

How such ideals come to infuse the thinking and behavior of growing numbers, and how this process can be consciously fostered and accelerated, are questions of central importance to the environmental movement and to humanity as a whole.

(One Planet – One Habitation §27)

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Much remains to be learned about models of society that prioritize ethical principles and actively foster their development and application throughout a population. Establishing within each United Nations agency a focal point of learning about the practical application of moral and ethical principles, rather than simply seeking ready solutions, could generate knowledge about how advancement can be promoted across the full range of human experience.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

A notable alternative to the paradigm of material advancement alone can be found in the significance that multitudes around the world place in the transcendence of the human spirit and its connection with the divine. Much could be learned from a systematic and scientific inquiry into communities that are learning to apply spiritual principles—such as selflessness, solidarity with others, and stewardship for the natural world—to advance broad-based social progress.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

In addition to various United Nations initiatives already focused on engagement with faith-based organizations, such an inquiry could explore alternative sources of motivation and inspiration, and the impact they can have on community and environmental well-being.

(One Planet – One Habitation §28)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

In working to build a more sustainable world, humanity has at its disposal two mutually reinforcing systems of knowledge and practice: science and religion.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

Scientific inquiry has been a vital instrument in seeking to understand physical reality and in forging innovative solutions based on a search for truth and a commitment to learning. When combined with values such as freedom from prejudice and bias it has enabled humanity to separate fact from conjecture.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

Scientific capabilities—of observing, measuring, rigorously testing ideas—have allowed us to construct a coherent understanding of the laws and processes governing physical reality, as well as to gain insights into human conduct and the working of society. Far from being the province of researchers and academics alone, the methodologies of scientific inquiry are tools that any individual or community can employ.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

For its part, religion provides a framework by which high ideals can be applied to individual lives and to the life of society, for the betterment of all. The spiritual principles animating the world's enduring religions have aided individuals and entire populations to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and the nature of the good life and the good society.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

When true to these ideals, religion has provided a bulwark against ideologies of materialism that would reduce human beings to mere resources to be exploited or consumers to be satiated.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

At its highest, religion has not only raised the call to virtues such as integrity, good character, high resolve, cooperation, and sacrificial endeavor, but drawn growing numbers together around such principles, unifying disparate elements, and giving rise to cohesive communities working to manifest high ideals in practice.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

Taken together, science and religion provide fundamental organizing principles by which lasting progress can be made. When both the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity are kept in mind, and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce human progress to the consumption of goods, services, and technological packages is avoided.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Science and Religion: Complementary Systems of Knowledge and Practice

Both science and religion are essential to the liberation of individuals and communities from the traps of ignorance and passivity. Both are vital to the advancement of civilization.

(BOX: Science and Religion)

Religion and Science

*Religion and science are the two wings
upon which man's intelligence
can soar into the heights,
with which the human soul can progress.*

— Bahá'í holy writings

Justice as process and outcome

Central to any authentic conception of oneness at a planetary level are issues of justice.

That widespread suffering has resulted from humanity's extractive relationship with the natural world, that a select few benefit from excessive use of the earth's resources to the detriment of many others, that immediate preferences often override the basic needs of future generations—these reveal profound injustices to people and planet.

Justice as process and outcome

Correcting such ills will require an honest reckoning, along with creativity, perseverance, and humility in response.

The voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order will need to figure far more prominently into decision-making processes at all levels.

(One Planet – One Habitation §30)

Justice as process and outcome

Insight will need to be sought from populations sustaining more harmonious relationships with the natural world, many of whom live in areas other than urban centers. Diverse cultural understandings of humanity's relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples, can provide needed insights into the creation of more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

(One Planet – One Habitation §30)

Justice as process and outcome

Justice demands a wide range of outcomes—that the benefits of human civilization be distributed with equity, for example, or that responsibility for undertaking necessary transitions be apportioned in light of actors' historic contributions to the present climate crisis. But justice at the level of outcome is established only through the operation of justice at the level of process.

(One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At the individual level, justice calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments and equity in one's treatment of others.

At the group level, it is the practical expression of awareness that the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked.

It also requires a standard of truth-seeking far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize present-day relations—a process of consultation and decision-making that is principled, candid, and fact-based.

(One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At all levels, the capacity to manifest justice—and commitment to doing so—must be strengthened. Just and equitable relationships are indispensable foundations for any unified global movement for the common good.

(One Planet – One Habitation §32)

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Justice demands coherence between word and deed. Beyond establishing new bodies or concluding new agreements, therefore, the international community must make the fulfillment of promises already made a keystone of all future efforts. In doing so, it can help reestablish stores of trust which have become perilously depleted in recent years—trust in elected authorities, trust in news media, trust in the findings of science, and trust in the commitments made by world leaders.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Within current structures, global arrangements could be made more just by establishing means to estimate and model the effects that proposed policies would have in the future. Such a forward-looking orientation, as seen, for example, in the proposed United Nations Special Envoy for Future Generations and building on the lessons learned from localities that have instituted such an approach, would help insulate decision-making from narrower interests of present actors and prioritize medium and long-term equity and stewardship.

(One Planet – One Habitation §33)

Learning as a mode of operation

A global civilization in a sustainable relationship with the natural world has never existed. Laying its foundations in numerous localities, reflecting a vast spectrum of social and ecological circumstances, therefore calls for a process of learning on a global scale. Basic requirements and foundational principles have been identified in numerous areas, ranging from physical processes to policy frameworks. Yet the wise application of principles to specific instances of social transformation is something that can only be learned through experience.

(BOX: Learning as a mode of operation)

Learning as a mode of operation

To take learning as a central objective of environmental action calls for specific habits and behaviors. When operating in a mode of learning, visions and strategies are re-examined time and again. Plans grow organically over time and are modified in light of action taken, experience generated, and lessons learned. Action is process-oriented, rather than solely defined by events or projects. Haphazard change is avoided and continuity of effort is maintained.

(BOX: Learning as a mode of operation)

Learning as a mode of operation

Genuine learning hinges as much on the motive and intent of actors, as on formal structures and processes. An international conference characterized by concern for status and reputation, or credit and blame, for example, will struggle to generate useful insights, no matter how many sessions are devoted to the sharing of best practices or lessons learned.

(BOX: Learning as a mode of operation)

Learning as a mode of operation

An orientation toward learning also requires understanding of the role of mistakes and setbacks in the path of progress. Whereas the scientific method makes full use of the dialectic of trial and error, international processes are often consumed by a search for the perfect program or policy from the outset. This must be replaced by a culture of exploration and an earnest search for appropriate solutions, in full recognition that all involved will, at times, encounter setbacks and fall short. Humility is the gateway to learning.

(BOX: Learning as a mode of operation)

Learning as a mode of operation

Vital to a mode of learning in action is the principle of consultation, understood as the process of building consensus about the truth of a situation and determining the wisest course of action among available options. In a consultative process, individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, and function instead as members of a collective with its own aims and goals.

(BOX: Learning as a mode of operation)

Sources

Bahá'í International Community. *One Planet, One Habitation: A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World*, 1 June 2022. https://iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH and https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/one_planet_one_habitation.pdf

Working Toward One Planet and One Habitation: Sustainability and Environmental Efforts by Bahá'í Communities Around the World <https://opoh.bic.org/>

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