

A Governance Befitting

*Humanity and the Path
Toward a Just Global Order*

A STATEMENT OF THE
BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY of the United Nations arrives as rapidly shifting global realities prompt a deeper appreciation of humanity's interconnection and interdependence. Amidst the disruption created and accelerated by a world-engulfing pandemic, numerous possibilities are opening for marked social change that can bring stability to the world and enrich the lives of its inhabitants. Throughout history, periods of turbulence have presented opportunities to redefine collective values and the assumptions that underlie them. So, too, does the present moment. The range of areas in which established systems

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and approaches are in need of radical transformation suggests how critical the coming quarter century—stretching from the United Nations' 75th anniversary to its centenary—will be in determining the fortunes of humanity. A growing chorus of voices is calling for decisive steps

forward in our collective trajectory toward enduring, universal peace. It is a call that must be answered.

The human family is one. This is a truth that has been embraced by multitudes around the world. Its profound implications for our collective behavior must now give rise to a coordinated movement toward higher levels of social and political unity. As Bahá'u'lláh declared over a century ago, "True peace and tranquility will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind." The perils of a global community divided against itself are too great to countenance.

The past century saw many steps—imperfect, yet significant—in laying the groundwork for a world order that could secure international peace and the prosperity of all. Humanity’s first serious attempt at global governance, the League of Nations, lasted 25 years. That the United Nations has already tripled this duration is impressive. Indeed, it is without parallel as a structure to engage all the world’s nations and a forum to express humanity’s common will. Yet recent events demonstrate that current arrangements are no longer sufficient in the face of cascading and increasingly interconnected threats. Integration and coordination must therefore be extended further. The only viable way forward lies in a system of deepening global cooperation. The present anniversary provides an opportune moment to begin building consensus about how the international community can better organize itself, and to consider what will be the standards by which to measure progress.

We therefore find ourselves at the threshold of a defining task: purposefully organizing our affairs in full consciousness of ourselves as one people in one shared homeland.

In recent years, reasoned critique of multilateral arrangements has, at times, been eclipsed by rejection of the very idea of a rules-based international order. Yet this period of pushback is embedded in broader historical processes carrying the global community toward stronger unity. At each stage in human history, more complex levels of integration become not only possible, but necessary. New and more pressing challenges emerge, and the body politic is compelled to devise new arrangements that address the

needs of the time through greater inclusivity, coherence, and collaboration. The demands of the present moment are pushing existing structures for facilitating deliberations among nations, as well as systems of conflict resolution beyond their capacity for effectiveness. We therefore find ourselves at the threshold of a defining task: purposefully organizing our affairs in full consciousness of ourselves as one people in one shared homeland.



TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE ONENESS of the human family is not to call for uniformity or to relinquish the wide range of established systems of governance. A true appreciation for the oneness of humanity contains within it the essential concept of diversity. What is needed today is a settled consensus that, while preserving the various systems and cultures around the world, embodies a set of common values and principles that can attract the support of every nation. A measure of

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agreement around these shared principles and norms can already be discerned in the ideals that inform global agendas, such as the universality of human rights, the imperative to eradicate poverty, or the need to live within environmentally

sustainable limits. But there is further to go, and the challenging implications of such ideals must be reckoned with.

A framework that accommodates a diversity of approaches, built on a commitment to unity and a shared ethic of justice, would allow common principles to be put into practice in

countless arrangements and formulations. Within such a framework, differences in political structure, legal system, and social organization would stand not as points of friction but as sources of potential insight into new solutions and approaches. To the extent that nations commit to learn from one another, ingrained habits of contest and blame can be replaced by a culture of cooperation and exploration, and a willing acceptance of setbacks and missteps as inevitable aspects of the learning process.

True acknowledgement of global interdependence requires genuine concern for all, without distinction. Deceptively simple, this principle implies a profound reordering of priorities. Too often, advancement of the common good is approached as a secondary objective—commendable, but to be pursued only after other, narrower national interests have been secured. This must change, for the welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. The starting point for consultation on any program or policy must be consideration of the impact it will have on all segments of society. Leaders and policymakers are thus confronted with a critical question in considering the merits of any proposed action, be it local, national, or international: will a decision advance the good of humankind in its entirety?

Whatever benefits have accrued from past conceptions of state sovereignty, present conditions demand a far more holistic and coherent approach to analysis and decision-making. What will be the global implications of domestic policies? What choices contribute to shared prosperity and sustainable peace? What steps foster nobility and preserve human dignity? As awareness of the oneness of humanity is increasingly woven into processes of decision-making, nations will find it easier to see each other as genuine partners in the stewardship of the planet and in securing the prosperity of its peoples.

When leaders consider the impact of policies before them, they will need to give thought to what so many might term the human spirit—that essential quality which seeks meaning and aspires to transcendence. These less tangible dimensions of human existence have typically been viewed as confined to the realm of personal belief and lying outside the concerns of policymakers and administrators. But experience has shown that progress for all is not attainable if material advancement is divorced from spiritual and ethical advancement. For example,

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economic growth over recent decades has indisputably brought about prosperity for many, but with that growth unmoored from justice and equity, a few have disproportionately benefited from its fruits and many are in precarious conditions. Those living in poverty are at the

greatest risk from any contraction of the world economy, which exacerbates existing inequalities and intensifies suffering. Every effort to advance society, even if concerned with material conditions alone, rests on underlying moral assumptions. Every policy reflects convictions about human nature, the values that further various social ends, and the way that given rights and responsibilities inform one another. These assumptions determine the degree to which any decision will yield universal benefit. They must therefore be the object of careful and honest examination. Only by ensuring that material progress is consciously connected to spiritual and social progress can the promise of a better world be fulfilled.



MOVEMENT TOWARD more coordinated and genuinely cooperative international relations will eventually require a process in which world leaders come together to recast and reconstitute the global order. For what was once viewed as an idealistic vision of international cooperation has, in light of the obvious and serious challenges facing humanity, become a pragmatic necessity. The efficacy of steps in this direction will hinge on well-worn patterns of stalemate and impasse being relinquished in favor of a global civic ethic. Deliberative processes will need to be more magnanimous, reasoned, and cordial—motivated not by attachment to entrenched positions and narrow interests but by a collective search for deeper understanding of complex issues. Objectives incompatible with the pursuit of the common good will need to be set aside. Until this is the dominant ethic, lasting progress will prove elusive.

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Such a posture reinforces a process-oriented approach to progress, building gradually on strengths and responding to evolving realities. And as collective capacity for reasoned and dispassionate inquiry into the merit of any given proposal grows, a range of reforms are worthy of further deliberation. For example, the establishment of a second chamber of the General Assembly of the United Nations, where representatives are directly elected—a so-called world parliamentary assembly—could do much to strengthen the legitimacy and connection people have to that global body. A world council on future affairs could institutionalize consideration of how policies might

impact generations to come and give attention to a range of issues such as preparedness for global crises, the use of emerging technologies, or the future of education or employment. Strengthening the legal framework relating to the natural world would lend coherence and vigor to the biodiversity, climate, and environmental regimes and provide a robust foundation for a system of common stewardship of the planet's resources. Reforming the overall infrastructure for promoting and sustaining peace, including reform of the Security Council itself, would enable familiar patterns of paralysis and deadlock to give way to a more decisive response to the threat of conflict. Such initiatives, or comparable innovations, would require much focused deliberation, and there would need to be a general consensus in favor of each for it to win acceptance and legitimacy. Of course, they would not, in themselves, be sufficient to meet the needs of humanity; nevertheless, to the degree that they would be improvements on what exists today, each could contribute its share to a process of growth and development that is truly transformative.

The world the international community has committed itself to build—in which violence and corruption have given way to peace and good governance, for example, and where the equality of women and men has been infused into every facet of social life—has never yet existed. Progress toward the goals enshrined in global agendas therefore calls for a conscious orientation toward experimentation, search, innovation, and creativity. As these processes unfold, the moral framework already defined by the United Nations Charter must be applied with increasing fidelity. Respect for international law, upholding fundamental human rights, adherence to treaties and agreements—only to the extent that such commitments are honored in practice can the United Nations and its Member States demonstrate a standard of integrity and

trustworthiness before the people of the world. Barring this, no amount of administrative reorganization will resolve the host of long-standing challenges before us. As Bahá'u'lláh declared, “Words must be supported by deeds, for deeds are the true test of words.”



THE YEARS CONCLUDING the United Nations' first century represent a period of immense opportunity. Collaboration is possible on scales undreamt of in past ages, opening unparalleled prospects for progress. Yet failure to reach an arrangement supporting effective global coordination risks consequences far more severe—potentially catastrophic—than those arising from recent disruptions. The task before the community of nations, then, is to ensure that the machinery of international politics and power is increasingly directed toward cooperation and unity.

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At the centenary of the United Nations, might it not be possible for all the inhabitants of our common homeland to be confident that we have set in motion a realistic process for building the global order needed to sustain progress in the coming centuries? This is the hope of the Bahá'í International Community and the goal toward which it labors. We echo the poignant appeal long ago voiced by Bahá'u'lláh about the leaders and arbiters of human affairs: “Let them take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely afflicted world the remedy it requireth.”

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