

Baha'i International Community: History of Active Cooperation with the United Nations

Baha'i International Community: History of Active Cooperation with the United Nations

Introduction

The Baha'i International Community is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that both encompasses and represents the world-wide membership of the Baha'i Faith, including more than five million men and women from over 2,100 ethnic groups and almost every nationality, economic class, trade and profession. There are significant Baha'i communities in 235 countries and territories, of which 182 are organized as national (or regional) affiliates, with more than 12,500 organized local communities. As an NGO at the United Nations, the Baha'i International Community is an association of democratically elected national governing bodies known as National Spiritual Assemblies.

The Baha'i International Community has a long history of involvement with international organizations. At League of Nations headquarters in Geneva, an International Baha'i Bureau, established in 1926, served as a base for Baha'is participating in League activities. In 1945 when the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco, Baha'i representatives were present. In 1948 the Baha'i International Community registered with the UN as an international non-governmental organization (NGO) and in 1970 was granted consultative status (now called "special" consultative status) with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) followed in 1976, and with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1989. Working relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) were also established in 1989. Over the years, the Community has worked closely with the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UN Development Program (UNDP).

The Baha'i International Community has offices at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and representations to United Nations regional commissions and other offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and Vienna. In recent years an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women were established as part of its United Nations Office.

An Office of Public Information, based at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa and with a branch in Paris, disseminates information about the Baha'i Faith around the world and publishes a quarterly newsletter, ONE COUNTRY. Distributed in English, French, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and German to readers in over 170 countries, ONE COUNTRY covers social and economic development projects, relations with the United Nations system, and global issues of interest to decision makers.

Goals and Activities

Baha'i communities the world over are engaged in activities to help achieve the humanitarian, social and economic goals set forth in the UN Charter. These activities include, but are not limited to, fostering grass-roots participation in sustainable development initiatives, advancing the status of women, educating children, preventing drug abuse, eliminating racism, and promoting human rights education. Over 1600 projects are currently operated by Baha'i communities around the world, including approximately 300 schools owned and operated by Baha'is and at least 400 village tutorial schools.

The Baha'i International Community United Nations Office cooperates as an NGO, sharing its experience, and participating in regular sessions of such UN bodies as the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Social Development, and the Commission on Sustainable Development. According to its most recent quadrennial report to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) the Community participated in approximately 150 UN-sponsored meetings between January 1994 and December 1997, offering over 80 statements on a wide range of issues.

The Baha'i International Community UN Office was also fully involved, along with a number of its national affiliates, in the recent series of UN world conferences on pressing global issues and in parallel NGO activities. These conferences included the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the 1994 Global Conference on Small Island States in Barbados, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the 1996 UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul, and the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome. The NGO Forums held in conjunction with these UN conferences also drew enthusiastic and substantive Baha'i participation from all over the world.

In its relations with the United Nations, the Baha'i International Community promotes the principles on which a lasting peace can be built.

- Oneness of humanity. Recognition of the oneness of humanity is the foundation for peace, justice and order in the world. It implies an organic change in the structure of society.
- Equality of men and women. The emancipation of women is a prerequisite of peace. Indeed, only as women are welcomed into full partnership with men in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which inter-national peace can emerge.
- Universal standard for human rights. Human rights are inseparable from responsibilities. If peace, social progress and economic prosperity are to be established, human rights must be recognized and protected locally, nationally, and internationally. Moreover, individuals must be educated to recognize and respect their own rights and the rights of others.
- Economic justice and cooperation. A vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term-an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being of all the planet's inhabitants-will help galvanize the collective will to overcome such barriers to peace as the inordinate disparity between rich and poor.
- Universal education. Because ignorance is the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice, no nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens, both men and women. Education should promote the essential unity of science and

religion.

- An international auxiliary language. As the world becomes more interdependent, a single, universally agreed-upon auxiliary language and script must be adopted and taught in schools worldwide, as a supplement to the languages of each country. The adoption of such a language will improve communication among nations, reduce administrative costs, and foster unity among peoples and nations.

Addresses of Baha'i International Community United nations Offices

Baha'i International Community 866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120 New York NY 10017, USA

Telephone: 1 (212) 803-2500 Fax: 1 (212) 803-2566 E-mail: bic-nyc@bic.org

Baha'i International Community 15 rte des Morillons CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex (Geneva) Switzerland

Telephone: 41 (22) 798 54 00 Fax: 41 (22) 798 65 77 E-mail: bic@geneva.bic.org

BIC-Document Number: 00-0606