

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Statement requested by Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Bawa Jain, Secretary General, Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 21 March 2001.

New York, U.S.A.
21 March 2001

The coming together of the peoples of the world in a harmonious and creative relationship is the crucial need of the present hour. In the wake of advances in human knowledge which have deepened bonds of interdependence and contracted the planet, the central task now before all its inhabitants is laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect the oneness of human nature. Creating such a universal culture of collaboration and conciliation will require a return to spiritual awareness and responsibility.

More than a century ago, Baha'u'llah declared that humankind was entering a new era in its history when accelerating processes of unification would soon compel recognition that humanity is a single people with a common destiny. In appealing to humanity to accept the central truth of its oneness, and to set aside the barriers of race, religion and nationality, which have been the principal causes of conflict throughout history, Baha'u'llah urges, "*regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.*" There is, He said, no possibility of achieving world peace until the fundamental principle of unity has been accepted and given practical effect in the organization of society: "*The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.*" And: "*Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship? So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.*"

The unity that must underpin a peaceful and just social order is a unity which embraces and honors diversity. Oneness and diversity are complementary and inseparable. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. Acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity, therefore, implies the development of a global consciousness, a sense of world citizenship, and a love for all of humanity. It induces every individual to realize that, since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. It further suggests that if a peaceful international community is to emerge, then the complex and varied cultural expressions of humanity must be allowed to develop and flourish, as well as to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization. "*The diversity in the human family,*" the Baha'i writings emphasize, "*should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.*"

From this basic principle of the unity of the earth's peoples are derived virtually all concepts concerning human liberty and well-being. If the human race is one, any notion that a particular racial, ethnic, or national group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity must be dismissed; society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality for all its members regardless of color, creed or gender; and all individuals must be given the opportunity to realize their inherent potential and thereby contribute to *"an ever-advancing civilization."*

For too much of history, the evil of racism has violated human dignity. Its influence has retarded the development of its victims, corrupted its perpetrators and blighted human progress. Overcoming its devastating effects will thus require conscious, deliberate and sustained effort. Indeed, nothing short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility and prayerful reflection will succeed in effacing its pernicious stain from human affairs. *"Close your eyes to racial differences,"* is Baha'u'llah's counsel, *"and welcome all with the light of oneness."*

Clearly, the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding among the diverse segments of the human race cannot be a passive or rhetorical exercise. All forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices must be directly confronted. The implementation of appropriate legal measures that safeguard the rights and opportunities of all and the adoption of educational initiatives that foster human solidarity and global citizenship should be among the first practical steps taken by all nations.

The moral leadership provided by religious communities must undoubtedly be a key component of any such effort. To ensure a constructive role for religion, however, the followers of all faiths must acknowledge the strife and suffering caused by those who have appropriated the symbols and instruments of religion for their own selfish purposes. Fanaticism and conflict poison the wells of tolerance and represent corrupt expressions of true religious values. The challenge facing all religious leaders is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of social justice and peace. In His exhortation *"to observe tolerance and righteousness,"* Baha'u'llah affirms that it is possible to both believe in God and to be tolerant.

The path of unity and reconciliation is the only path available to the human family. A world in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united is not a utopian vision but an inevitable and vital necessity. *"Illumine and hallow your hearts; let them not be profaned by the thorns of hate or the thistles of malice,"* Baha'u'llah warns. *"Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will. Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love."*

BIC-Document Number: 01-0321