

Activities in the Baha'i World Community to Improve the Status of Women during the United Nations Decade for Women

Report presented to the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace

Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda: Forward looking strategies of implementation for the advancement of women for the period up to the year 2,000, and concrete measures to overcome the obstacles to achievements of the goals and objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, and the subthemes: Employment, Health and Education, bearing in mind the International Strategy for the Third Development Decade and the establishment of a New International Economic Order

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Introduction

In October 1983, the Baha'i International Community sent National Baha'i Assemblies throughout the world a questionnaire inquiring about activities which their communities had organized during the United Nations Decade for Women to achieve equality of rights, privileges, and responsibilities for both sexes, as well as to report on obstacles that these communities had faced -- and were still facing -- in reaching this goal. The Assemblies were also asked to provide information on programmes and activities for women which they were planning beyond the Decade. [An earlier questionnaire sent to National Baha'i Assemblies in 1972 sought information on the degree of implementation in their communities of the principle of the equality of men and women. Replies received were summarized in a report entitled "Preliminary Enquiry into the Status of Women in the Baha'i World Community," circulated widely during International Women's Year (1975) and at the IWY World Conference in Mexico City.]

The present report draws on information received from 77 of the 143 Assemblies canvassed, and comprises data from countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Australasia, and Europe. It is, therefore, quite representative of worldwide Baha'i concern for the advancement of women, and of steps taken by Baha'i communities to cooperate with the United Nations in its long-standing efforts to improve the status of women.

The responses received from both the 1973 and 1983 questionnaires confirm the necessity for the change in attitudes emphasized by the United Nations, as well as stressing the importance of education for the realization of the equality of men and women. They also indicate that Baha'i communities are engaged in

many innovative activities to foster the advancement of women -- while maintaining unity in the family and in the community, conditions essential, in the Baha'i view, for healthy progress in bringing about the equality of the sexes.

Baha'i communities, while realistic in their assessment of obstacles to be overcome, are dedicated to a change in attitudes, and are working systematically and in a practical way to win the goal of equality of the sexes. They are dedicated to the education of women, even in preference to that of men, since women, as mothers, have such an important bearing on the life of future generations. In addition, they see the importance of women's potential for the accomplishment of peace and world order as women increasingly participate in all areas of community life.

It should be pointed out that all individual Baha'is and Baha'i institutions are committed to the belief that the teachings of their Faith are invested with divine authority and that the principles of these teachings are the guidance toward which they continually turn for new insight and understanding. It is inevitable at this time in the history of the Baha'i world community that there are wide differences in the understanding, as well as in the application, of these principles, and that the full appreciation of their significance, and their demonstration in action, are dependent upon many factors in the life of the individual and in society. Baha'i communities, although very different one from another, since they include a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds, are also very similar. They express a unique unity in diversity, unity in that all accept Baha'u'llah, the Founder of their Faith, as the Divine Prophet for this period in human history, and are committed to the world-view, principles and laws He has brought; diversity in that they are an unusual blend of nationalities, races, creeds, classes, and temperaments -- all welcomed and appreciated in the Baha'i Faith and its world community.

During the UN Decade For Women (1976-1985)

The activities which have been undertaken by Baha'i communities show wide diversity both because of the specific challenges posed in each society -- the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented -- as well as the fact that national Baha'i communities are in different stages of growth and have greater or lesser strength in numbers.

The most frequently mentioned positive influence for the integration of women in community life, according to the questionnaire replies, has been the Baha'i administrative order. Therefore, since the way in which these communities function is part of the learning process in which Baha'is voluntarily participate as they become voting members, a few words about the nature of the administrative order that fosters the development of the Baha'i community are pertinent.

The administrative structure which Baha'is are finding so effective -- now functioning in over 140 countries and in varied cultural environments representing 2000 ethnic backgrounds -- encourages universal participation, in consultation and decision-making, in the smallest community on up. An important element of this system is an election process by secret ballot, free from the practice of nominations and electioneering. Members of the local community elect by free choice those men and women they feel are best qualified to make decisions on a whole range of human concerns. The members are asked *"to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience."* The elected administrative council regularly consults with all members of the community at large, drawing from the diversity of viewpoints that necessarily exists in every situation. Once decisions of the council are reached by unanimous or majority vote, everyone in the community is committed to uphold them, ensuring

in this way the unified support of the community at large.

This joint decision-making process eliminates the evils of political partisanship that seek to undermine a plan of action, and prevents the influence of pressure groups promoting special interests.

The importance of the role which this administrative system has had in advancing women during the Decade can be seen in several observations drawn from a wide range of geographical areas.

In an East African country, [Kenya] for instance, where the Baha'i community experienced a significant growth in the past ten years, primarily at the grass roots level, it was reported that the development of the administrative order of the Baha'i Faith had been "a key factor in the involvement and participation of women," with "more women serving on both appointed and elected Baha'i institutions." In another country, in West Africa, [Nigeria] it was noted that "the equality of women had been enhanced by wider administrative experience," and that women are both "included in most of the national and regional committees appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly," and "also serve on many Local assemblies." It was further observed by the Baha'i community of a Central African country [Central African Republic] that the main activities organized by Baha'i institutions to improve the conditions of women had "often been successful because of the sustained efforts of the local Baha'i assemblies," and that many women served actively in Baha'i communities "without experiencing discrimination."

The questionnaire replies also indicated that it is not unusual for women to serve on National Baha'i Assemblies as well as on Local Assemblies "often as officers," [Jamaica] and that as they begin to function actively, "they learn to take leadership roles" [Jamaica] and to participate "without restriction in consultation and decision-making" [Paraguay] in the local and national administrative functions of the Baha'i community: "Women both vote and are elected." [Paraguay]

One of the clearest explanations of the changes occurring in women through their commitment to the teachings and principles of the Baha'i Faith, and their involvement in the activities of the Baha'i community, is found in the following reply:

The very act of becoming a Baha'i is the first major personal decision for most women in rural areas. Then, as they are deepened in the Baha'i teachings and the role they are expected to play in Baha'i administrative activity, they are changed from being passive members of an existing social order into dynamic members of a new order. Because of their functions in serving on Baha'i administrative bodies and in voting and in being voted for and elected, women have made great strides in a largely male dominated society. An increasing number of local Baha'i assemblies have women as members and local assemblies with all women members have also been reported. [India]

Two additional comments help further to understand the process:

The opportunity given to women to participate in the Baha'i administrative institutions is a contributing factor in improving their condition. [Panama]

Though traditionally women do not take a real role in decision-making, Baha'i women are elected to local and national Baha'i administrative posts. As they serve in these positions, they educate other women. [Samoa]

The replies to the questionnaire also indicate that as a result of this administrative system the percentage of women participating as delegates to the Baha'i national conventions, called yearly to elect the National Baha'i Assemblies, has increased. One country, in fact, remarked on this "significant increase" as a "sign of change." [Netherlands]

Also reported was the regular participation of women in increasing numbers, through election, on the National and Local Assemblies, and through appointment, on national and local committees. One country felt that an important contribution to the UN Decade for Women was the fact that "women were serving on the Local Assemblies and national committees." [United Kingdom] One reply [Hawaii] indicated that "over one half of the present membership of local Baha'i administrative bodies are women," and "over thirty percent of the membership of the National Assembly are women." In another country [El Salvador] "one third of the National Baha'i Assembly are women," and, perhaps even more important, "the percentage is about one fourth women on the Local Assemblies, and most of these Baha'i communities are in rural areas." Furthermore "one fourth of Baha'i national committees are made up of women."

The overall experience of Baha'i communities would seem to indicate, as expressed in one specific case, that women "share equal rights and participate fully in Baha'i activities." [Australia]

In addition, illiteracy has not been seen as a deterrent in the election of women to Baha'i institutions, as indicated by the election in one African country, [Benin] to the National Assembly of an illiterate villager (1976), an illiterate market woman (1977), and an illiterate housewife (1976). In 1983, the first of these three women was re-elected to the Assembly.

One comment sums up the impact of the Baha'i administrative system on the development of the potentialities of women:

Women are truly exercising to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community. The success of their efforts is due to a sense of dignity, spiritual assurance, education and the recognition of the role of women in all avenues of society. Since many women are involved in all aspects of Baha'i administration and community life, this appears to be the area where the principle of equality bears the most fruit. [New Zealand]

The recent replies to the questionnaire also indicate that conferences, institutes, seminars, school programmes and study classes have played a prominent part in the education of men as well as women in Baha'i families and communities. The establishment of tutorial schools, literacy training projects, sustained deepening programmes, the publication of pertinent information in native languages, as well as the advantages of cross-cultural exposure, have all been of great benefit in Baha'i communities. It is also apparent that Baha'is not only seek out information on medical advances, but actively promote principles of good nutrition, hygiene, and other beneficial health practices. Belief in the importance of both science and religion as aspects of one reality has led Baha'is to this commitment.

The importance which Baha'is place on the acquisition of moral and spiritual qualities as they seek to strengthen human character are seen to directly affect the development of men and women who come under Baha'i influences. Baha'i marriage laws, concepts of family unity, and the responsibility of all family members, a spirit of loving cooperation between men and women, and encouragement, assistance and support in Baha'i communities, are important elements in the progress that Baha'is are making. It will be seen that all these communities work towards the equality of men and women, the strengthening of the family unit, and for the unity, order, and stability of the community.

Beyond the Decade

As to future programmes and activities to implement the long-range goals to which Baha'is are committed, many National Baha'i Assemblies not only state their aims, but outline specific ways in which they intend to accomplish them. The orientation towards the advancement and development of women is clear; and the promise for future generations even more hopeful, as Baha'is deepen in the understanding of the principles

and teachings of their Faith, and educate their children in them as well.

The scope of future programmes and activities can be gleaned from the excerpts that follow:

Africa

Benin

Plans involve a project for literacy classes in villages with the Baha'i Youth Exchange, which would include women. There would also be collaboration with women's organizations to accomplish certain projects for women and girls during and after International Youth Year. A national women's conference is planned, to which Baha'i women speakers from the French-speaking world will be invited. It is hoped that some of these women will come early, or remain after the conference, to visit women in local Baha'i communities, teaching and encouraging relevant local activities. Through collaboration with the United Nations and health and welfare agencies, new ideas will reach the Baha'i women, and help them improve the conditions of their lives.

Burkina Faso

Baha'i women will be encouraged to take an active part in all social and economic development projects. The planning of national or regional conferences for women, institutes, and contacts with different women's organizations in the country are also considered important. The sensitizing of men regarding the role which women play in society -- noticeably in education, health, peace, employment, and social and economic development of a nation is another goal.

Central African Republic

Centers for women will continue to be maintained by the Baha'is. These include spiritual, health, and nutritional education, as well as literacy training for women.

The Gambia

The spiritual component in human and social development seems to be our main resource in The Gambia. Individuals as well as Baha'i administrative institutions in The Gambia are cooperating with local, national, and international development efforts, offering professional expertise and Baha'i principles. It would appear that the rapid strengthening of local Baha'i communities is a necessity for the expansion of future programmes.

Ghana

There will be an effort to involve Baha'i women in local Baha'i activities, to appoint women to committees, and to educate women through the organization of women's conferences. Vocational schools will be established to train women in relevant fields and to deepen understanding of the principles of the equality of men and women.

Kenya

The most important way that women can be assisted is through the continued development of the Baha'i administrative order, in particular, the establishment and strengthening of local Baha'i assemblies. The evolving maturity of the local assemblies assures the increased involvement of women because of the basic principles of equality and universal participation. Specific activities include the encouragement of women to actively participate in all areas of community life, to increase the number of women's groups, both those of an informal nature and more formal, self-help cooperatives. To assist this development, suitable materials will be developed by the National Women's and Children's Committee, including those available from government ministries. The National Women's and Children's Committee has already in process a series of booklets designed for rural, semi-literate women. Topics include: creating a spiritual home, teaching good character, using discipline effectively, learning at home and at school, and raising healthy children. Materials available from government ministries are in areas of agriforestry, literacy, appropriate technology, and water programmes. Conferences at the local, regional, and national levels, have been most effective tools for the development of women.

An indispensable factor in bringing about equality of women is the understanding on the part of men of the role they play; increased emphasis will be given to the role of men in realizing the principle of equality.

The beginning of pre-primary schools run by local assemblies will also contribute to the development of women. These schools will primarily employ women teachers and help provide for their training. They will have the same curriculum for boys and girls and teach the equality of men and women.

Nigeria

New social and economic development projects undertaken by the Baha'i community will involve women. There will continue to be a women's committee which will sponsor specific activities for women. Increased community activities is anticipated. Women will receive scholarships enabling them to attend conferences, while encouraging the support of their husbands in managing the household in their absence.

Rwanda

Future projects will include literacy training, the instruction of women in the education of children by means of booklets, and assistance to women in housekeeping, hygiene, and health responsibilities.

Tanzania

Experience has shown that deepening women in the understanding of the Baha'i Faith widens their perspective and gives them self-confidence. This can be done by holding women's conferences at local, regional, and perhaps, national levels to both deepen them in the Baha'i teachings and to provide a forum for discussion of women's ideas and concerns. As a follow-up, the production and circulation of a women's magazine, focusing on the same topics as the conferences, and with special emphasis on nutrition education, would be helpful.

Zimbabwe

In the field of development, plans include the organization of literacy programmes for Baha'i women through tutorial schools and the organization of cooperatives by the women in some of the villages, for

agricultural production. Women's institutes and conferences will be organized to educate women.

Since unity in the family is a goal for Baha'is, women can be encouraged to hold women's meetings to share and deepen themselves in the elements of family life. The committee can hold conferences to create better understanding of unity and the equality of men and women.

Americas

Brazil

A special meeting of Baha'i women will take place to consult on and approve plans for a greater integration of Baha'i women in social and economic projects in the fields of education, health, and family. Regional seminars with the same purpose will consider the specific problems of each region in the country. Other goals are to publish a special brochure with selections from the Baha'i Writings regarding the importance of women and their role; stimulating the participation of Baha'i women in local communities, in social activities of a humanitarian nature, providing assistance, under the initiative of local Baha'i assemblies; and encouraging their participation with other institutions already acting in the social field, or working for the advancement of women.

Canada

The development of women can be encouraged by: 1) Continuing to provide activities which will upgrade management and leadership skills in women, 2) Educating local communities regarding the status of women, 3) Increasing the understanding of the Baha'i Writings regarding women, 4) Educating young women regarding family life, educational goals, and the development and use of their capacities.

Proposed goals include the following: 1) To foster association with Native and French Canadian Women's Organizations, 2) Organization of a Conference on Women as a part of the programme of the Association for Baha'i Studies, 3) Collaborative activity involving the Association for Baha'i Studies with major women's organizations in Canada, 4) Membership of at least one Baha'i woman in all major women's organizations, 5) Public relations activities to inform men and women of Canada on issues of equality of men and women, 6) Communication with all individual Baha'i women on these goals, and regular communication on our progress in meeting them.

Chile

The most effective way of assisting the development of women will be 1) To foster greater understanding among Baha'is of the Baha'i teachings regarding the position of women, 2) To encourage a reorientation in the education of children, 3) To make provision for the publication of a Baha'i bulletin for women, 4) To establish closer ties with the media and publications devoted to women, 5) To establish closer ties with women's organizations, 6) To encourage Baha'i participation in activities organized to promote the status of women (seminars, conferences, interviews, programmes, etc.), 7) To organize regional and national conferences on women with the participation of other organizations interested in the equality of men and women, 8) To initiate a programme of studies on women including a) the problems of women in technical and professional activities, b) the problems of women at different periods of life -- adolescent, youth, adult, and aging, c) the problems concerning marriage, divorce, widowhood, second marriages, single parents, etc., d) consideration of the responsibilities of women in relation to children, and e) discussion of general social conditions affecting women. It is important to downplay machismo and change the

educational preference which is usually given to the male child.

El Salvador

We feel that it is important to make known the principles of the equality and rights for both sexes, not only among men, but also among the women themselves. There is an awareness of the need for girls to receive education and to be permitted to choose careers, trades, and professions in accordance with their own desires and capacities.

While pointing out that the ignorance and the under-utilization of the capacities of women in communities is due to traditional attitudes, it must be made clear that the equality of the sexes promoted by the Baha'i teachings does not necessarily agree with the ideas of "sexual emancipation," which come from other countries. It is important to make clear that men themselves will delay their own development if women do not advance. It is necessary that women become true companions in all aspects of family and community life.

Guyana

Local Baha'i assemblies, often concentrating their attention on the participation and development of women in their communities, will help a great deal in the future. Children's classes, taught mostly by women, will strengthen the base of the community. Functioning Baha'i assemblies will play a vital role in the process of education, which will have a profound effect on many aspects of the condition of women in Guyana.

Although attention has been paid to family life, where the women play a major role, and to the need for women to acquire reading skills and general education, another aspect important to stress is family consultation, including the elements of mutual trust and joint problem solving.

Panama

The Baha'i community should organize regional and national women's conferences, since in these conferences women learn of their rights and develop the courage to speak. The whole community, including the men must also become convinced of the importance of the rights of women, so that they can be put into practice. It is very important that women feel the desire to have the same rights as men in social relationships and in education, and that they express their needs. In this way, the community will develop and express a new level of well-being.

Paraguay

Regular bulletins designed to encourage and stimulate the participation of women will be produced, and there will be a greater diffusion of the principle of equality of men and women through the use of mass media, the organization of conferences and programmes concerning the family. There must be emphasis as well on the acceptance of equality of women on the part of men.

Peru

Simple educational programmes related to development, equality, health, employment and peace will be planned to foster the advancement and participation of women. This goal will include the education of children, through whom mothers can be reached, as well as a constant effort to assist women of all social strata.

St. Lucia

Increasing the number of local Baha'i assemblies, and the establishment of adult education programmes should lead to the increased development of Baha'i women, who will be gaining administrative experience and greater confidence in themselves.

United States

Important ways the community can assist in the development of women are:

A. the establishment of a national women's committee whose role would be to:

1. make the subject of equality of men and women one of national importance and attention to Baha'is,
2. closely examine the attitudes and traditions preventing equality of men and women and develop ways to change them within the community,
3. encourage local or regional Baha'i women's committees whose concerns would be to organize informal study groups and local conferences to explore the needs and concerns of women,
4. encourage the non-sexist education of children,
5. encourage and support women to become persons in their own right,
6. encourage and support women to explore their role in relationship to social and economic development and world peace,
7. encourage and support men to begin to explore their changing roles in relationship to the equality of men and women;

B. development of special study materials related to:

1. equality of men and women,
2. interpersonal relationships -- male/female relationships,

3. cooperation and greater equality within marriage,
4. personal growth and development,
5. exploring the development of attitudes and traditions and introducing new options to thinking and behavior;

C. communicate with Baha'i and non-Baha'i experts in fields relating to the issue.

Venezuela

Baha'i marriage -- including laws, practices, and attitudes -- will be a major theme in conferences, institutes, and other Baha'i events, especially those involving youth. The requirements for marriage, a concern of Baha'i assemblies as well as individual Baha'is, will also be addressed by a committee on Baha'i life which has been created to identify and counsel youth who are thinking of marriage. The importance of chastity before marriage and loyalty after marriage will be emphasized. Great effort will continue to be given to marriages in difficulty, helping through consultation with the partners in marriage to solve their problems.

Asia

Bangladesh

General plans include women's conferences, study classes for women, vocational training opportunities for women, and the training of women teachers.

India

Special training courses for women are envisaged on a state level also. Another important goal will be to ensure the complete participation of women in Baha'i administration and in the training of children. The latter, particularly, is a very significant step in bringing up a new generation who will practice the principle of the equality of men and women because it is inculcated in them from an early age. The development of tutorial schools will also play an important role, and the publication of newsletters and magazines will continue.

Malaysia

The following activities are considered to be important. 1) The spiritual influence of prayers shared in the family, 2) The education of women as mothers and child educators, 3) Service projects, such as care for the aged and handicapped, 4) Regular meetings for self-improvement, fellowship, public speaking, motivation, first-aid and other subjects of interest, 5) Counseling to assure love and concern for people in time of need, 6) Rural development projects, including emphasis on hygiene, nutrition; pre-natal, birth, and child care assistance; and guidance on marriage problems.

Singapore

Women will be encouraged to participate in activities of women's organizations. An education programme on "Parenting" has been organized this year. Women will also be encouraged to adopt personal goals in relation to community activities.

Thailand

Future plans include: 1) Vocational education such as classes on sewing, typing and weaving; 2) Parenting; 3) Pre-school education; 4) Community participation -- with greater emphasis on women's participation in the spiritual and administrative aspects of Baha'i community life. Part of the women's activities have been classes on cooking, nutrition, and handicrafts to supplement family income. Also, special classes have been provided by one Local Assembly for women to teach literacy, nutrition and health practices.

Australasia

Australia

The Baha'i community can help to strengthen the social fabric of the community at large by strengthening its families. What seems to be needed most is adjusting family relationships to preserve the family unit in a society in which women are as free as men. Local Baha'i assemblies and the National Community Development Committee have arranged seminars, summer school programmes and workshops to this end.

Fiji

Baha'i women at village level will be encouraged and assisted to attend training courses conducted by government agencies aimed at educating and expanding the vision of women. Women's conferences will be held and women will be encouraged to participate in courses which will train them to acquire skills, enabling them to earn money in their own right.

Special training courses for women and potential mothers to educate them in training their children, as well as marriage guidance study programmes, will be held. A method of training women to become aware of the necessity for them to become actively involved in development is anticipated. Plans include the education of men in the principle of equality of men and women. The passive acceptance by women of decisions made by men will be discouraged. Seminars, school programmes, and teaching conferences are some of the means by which these goals can be accomplished.

Marshall Islands

Through deepening their understanding of the Baha'i Writings, women can become stronger, less shy and fearful, and learn to express their ideas and feelings. Their abilities can then be used in community-wide meetings and activities. Men need also to be educated on the importance of each person, man and woman alike.

This year the Baha'i Community will be holding its Fourth Annual Baha'i Women's Conference, where numerous subjects concerning women will be discussed.

New Caledonia

Recognition of the rights of women in the Melanesian and Polynesian environment, stressing the increasing participation of women in social and cultural activities, will be encouraged. Concerning the education of children, the National Baha'i Assembly believes that in one or two generations notable progress will be realized in this area, since children are being educated in the equality of men and women in the home, in the summer and winter schools, and in projects and holiday camps.

New Zealand

A majority of the local Baha'i assemblies are making firm plans to assist in the development of women. There is universal recognition that the concept of equality must be taught in children's classes, as well as seen by example in the life of the local community. In this way, future generations will have a greater understanding of the principle. Other plans include education seminars, intercommunity gatherings, study classes -- especially for new members -- and full support for activities such as the UN Decade for Women. Women will be encouraged to take their rightful place in all aspects of community life, therefore setting an example for other women. A Baha'i women's committee will be appointed which will investigate opportunities existing in the social and economic development area. There will also be consultation, seminars, meetings and conferences with men.

Papua New Guinea

Teaching Baha'i principles of education, which give emphasis to the education of women; undertaking development projects that involve women and give them an income; and teaching the present generation of men regarding the status of women -- are important ways to advance the position of women.

Samoa

As women become more involved in teaching the Baha'i Faith, and become deepened in understanding its principles, they will share their new "awareness" with others. When women, especially at the village level, become knowledgeable of the role they play as mothers and educators, they will realize the important role they play in society.

Rural development programmes are being considered with discussion on the education of women, child care and health. The introduction of such projects as sewing classes, weaving, handicrafts, etc. into each village is being considered. This would be done with the assistance of the local Rural Development Bureau, and with the encouragement of the local Baha'i assemblies in each community.

Tonga

A regional programme has been planned to give opportunity for women to teach and participate in administrative activities, to hold institutes on the equality of men and women, and to organize conferences for women on the role of women. A women's committee has been appointed to plan a Women's Day, to which prominent women will be invited to participate.

Europe

Austria

It is important to make women and men more aware of the promise in Baha'i teachings that "*When women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world -- war will cease.*" The National Assembly of Austria calls attention to the statement [UN Document #E/CN.6/1984/NGO/1.] submitted by the Baha'i International Community to the Commission on the Status of Women in Vienna, February, 1984: "... They (women) must make constant effort to acquire and develop peaceful virtues and attitudes, to understand the fundamental issues related to world peace -- including the basic causes of war -- and to dedicate themselves to the greater goal of world solidarity in which all nations and people must play a part, but none shall dominate or control."

France

We have emphasized the principle of the equality of rights of men and women, and the importance of the woman in the education of children and her essential place in the heart of society. In our community and in our institutions we are making sure that women find their place and participate fully in the life of the Baha'i community at all levels.

Spain

Either because they better understand the issue, or because of the social changes in the country, the Baha'i women in Spain are active in practically all existing Baha'i institutions, either at the national, regional or local level. In six communities, there are specific activities for women, such as periodic meetings organized and run wholly by Baha'i women, attended by women from the community at large. The Baha'i women in our country are assuming ever greater responsibilities, working harmoniously with the men. One can notice, as is natural in Baha'i families with small children, that care is alternately shared, permitting both spouses to participate in the activities of the local community. The theme of equality of rights has been promoted by Baha'i communities in public conferences in many cities of the country. Also we have widely distributed the pamphlet "The Equality of Men and Women: A Baha'i View" prepared by the Baha'i International Community. We have also included this pamphlet in a general information dossier presented to the media, authorities, and personalities in general. Within the Baha'i community, we have circulated a compilation of Baha'i Writings on the equality of rights for men and women, and the subject has been the object of consideration in national and regional schools and in deepening classes in local communities.

Switzerland

The matter of the equality of men and women comes up in all Baha'i meetings. Therefore, the Baha'i teachings on this subject have and will continue to be made known whenever possible. Furthermore, Baha'i women have taken an active part in meetings of "Donne per la Pace" (Women for Peace) and have had active discussions with women in organizations such as "Amnesty International." In Lugano we have been aided also by the fact that a woman is the chairperson of the Local Assembly. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, i.e. in St. Gallen, our Public Relations Committee for that region organizes a yearly symposium. The theme in 1981 was "the rank of women in the religions"; the theme for 1982 was peace. We have noted a growing interest of the female population in Eastern Switzerland for our symposia.

United Kingdom

Members of the External Affairs Committee are participating in a series of seminars on "Women and Religion," sponsored by the University of London, Goldsmith College. This committee has also been encouraging women in the entire Baha'i community to join women's associations, and participate in their activities. It has asked the Baha'i community to arrange special meetings for women, inviting their local women's associations, church ladies' groups, and other bodies, and individuals.

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