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Peace and Development

Statement to the United Nations International Year of Peace Seminar for the Asia and Pacific and Western Asia Regions

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It is inconceivable that any lasting peace on this planet can be achieved without resolving the complex problems of social and economic development that afflict contemporary societies. The interconnectedness of human lives at physical and psychological levels -- brought about by a global intricate network of communication and transportation -- is such that it would be unthinkable to consider peace a condition characterized simply by worldwide absence of conflict, when millions of people die yearly from starvation, disease and poverty.

Much has been said and written about development, the proper way to achieve it -- from the bottom up, beginning at the grass roots, involving everyone in the process of building a satisfactory quality of life. It is generally agreed today that development must involve those suffering because of inadequate food, water, sanitation, housing, etc., in decision and action, otherwise both the validity and the degree of success of any development programs will be sacrificed.

The view of the Bahá'í International Community on the role of development in the achievement of a global society in a world at peace was shared with the Commission on Human Rights at its 40th session in 1984 in a statement on the right to development:

> "The Bahá'í vision is the ultimate creation of a global civilization, a world commonwealth uniting all nations as its autonomous members and safeguarding the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them, in a just and equitable order. Development is perceived as a dual and mutually reinforcing individual and societal process, in which society, molded by its citizens, in turn reacts on the character of the individual in such a way that the realization of his potential is facilitated."

The quality of life of the individual, however, demands in our view far more than the satisfaction of material needs. The whole purpose of an individual's life must be taken into account, to provide freedom from both internal and external want. Only then can it be considered that people live in a condition of peace. If tomorrow we should have a condition of non-war (not truly peace, but the absence of war), with general and complete disarmament, freeing billions of dollars for use in social and economic development, still the question would persist about what kind of social and economic changes will best serve the aspirations of human beings for conditions of personal and social peace that can evolve into a planetary civilization rich in opportunities for continuous creative development of the human personality and of the social, economic and political structures.

Since, in our view -- as cited in the Bahá'í Writings -- *"religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples,"* there is certainly, in the search for peace and for an understanding of its interrelationship to development, a need to reconsider, without the prejudice instilled by a secular society, the nature of religion and of religious values. The Bahá'í International Community noted in a statement to the Commission for Social Development several years ago (E/CN.5/NGO/117; 3 January 1975), that effective development will, we feel, depend on moral and spiritual values beginning with the individual and extending to society. From even cursory observation, it would appear that individual and social selfishness, greed, dishonesty, hatred and injustice are the reverse of what is needed to bring about the unity and understanding, without which no progress can be made. It may seem a clich? to say that love, justice, trustworthiness, honesty and other traditional moral-spiritual values are essential in our predominantly secular world to successfully bring about the changes necessary for personal and social integration in the complex life of this planet. But we have found that when they are channelled into a community life that is guided by an administrative order fostering the reflection of these qualities in social relations, as is the case in Bahá'í communities, then the result is noticeably healthy.

Further, in the experience and understanding of the Bahá'í world community, successful development, as a prerequisite for the establishment of world peace and the growth of a world society fostering and protecting the well-being of the whole of humanity must center on the realization that each person is inseparable from the total body of mankind. This human inter-relationship must be expressed, accordingly, in a lifetime of action devoted to building a global society, where not only the social and economic needs of the human race, but also its spiritual, moral and cultural aspirations, are fully provided for.

Unquestionably peace and development are the responsibility of all of humanity. As expressed in the Bahá'í Writings:

> "Great is the station of man. Great also must be his endeavours for the rehabilitation of the world and the well-being of nations....Were man to appreciate the greatness of his station and the loftiness of his destiny he would manifest naught save goodly character, pure deeds, and a seemly and praiseworthy conduct."

And further,

> "...the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men?...How excellent, how honorable is man, if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities....Supreme happiness is man's,...if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice."

As religion is reconsidered in our times, it will be seen that in the Holy Writings can be found the key to fundamental human education and development, the knowledge and values that have throughout history clarified the central aim of the human being -- to recognize and to worship God, and to carry forward an ever advancing civilization -- and revealed the real identity of the person as an agent expressing, through his relationship to the Creator, an attitude of love and service to humanity as a whole. Thus religion, in harmony with science, can afford each human being the opportunity to play his part in fostering development and peace on the planet. Freed of dogma, superstition,

and other man-invented encumbrances, religion can be seen as being congenial to science, not incompatible. The Bahá'í International Community expressed this point in the statement to the Commission for Social Development referred to earlier:

> "Since economic and social development are dependent on full application of the resources of science and technology to the solution of the urgent problems of food, population, environment, etc., it would seem essential, to ensure mass participation, that we bring science and religion into harmony, through an understanding of their basic nature as aspects of one reality: the first concerned with the physical existence of humanity and the second with the values that have traditionally given life its meaning. In our experience unless the basic unity of science and religion is clearly understood and established in individual and social consciousness, it is not easy to uproot outmoded customs and traditions that prevent the ready acceptance of valuable advances in science and technology."

In conclusion we would recommend that the IYP Secretariat encourage during the International Year of Peace a reassessment of the true nature of religion as a reservoir of guidance for human behavior and direction towards unity in contemporary life. It is our conviction that religion provides the essential element of humanity to underlie the contributions that science and technology make to economic and social development, and conversely, to peace. In a world where conflict has proved a dead-end as a resolution to human problems, where the viability of war has ceased, the only answer is to rediscover a process whereby the happiness of the whole human race -- as opposed to that of any one part of humanity, selected on whatever basis -- can be worked for and achieved. In this endeavor religion and science must work hand-in-hand.

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The Bahá'í Faith