

EXPERIENCE WITH BAHA'-INSPIRED PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

This paper is based primarily on the experience of two Baha'i-inspired professional organizations, the International Environment Forum (IEF) focusing on environment and sustainability, and ebbf - Ethical Business Building the Future (formerly the European Baha'i Business Forum) addressing business and work. The two organizations have always collaborated closely, partly through overlapping membership, including on their Governing Boards. The Director-General of ebbf is given a membership in IEF, and the General Secretary of IEF is offered a membership in ebbf to ensure coordination. This paper provides basic information on the structure and function of each organization, with their elements of success and lessons learned from a personal perspective.

OUTLINE CHRONOLOGY AND STATISTICS

ebbf - Ethical Business Building the Future (formerly European Baha'i Business Forum)

Discussions among a number of Baha'is in business in Europe began in 1987, leading to a meeting of about 30 in Chamonix, France, in 1990 that agreed to create a Baha'i-inspired organization, followed by a July 1991 meeting called by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) Office of Public Information in Paris, and the first ebbf annual conference and election of the Governing Board near Paris in 1991. The leading organizers were George Starcher, Ezzat Zahrai and Wendi Momen. George Starcher has written "*A History of the European Baha'i Business Forum: 20 years contributing to responsible business practices 1991-2011*" published by ebbf in 2013, which documents its activities and successes. Today ebbf has 380 members in about 50 countries, and about 900 in its online platform database. About a third of the membership is not Baha'i, including a member of the board, and they are some of the most enthusiastic and active supporters.

International Environment Forum (IEF)

After preparatory planning by a working group and guidance from the Bahá'í Office of Social and Economic Development (OCED), the International Environment Forum was launched at its first International Baha'i Environment Conference and General Assembly at de Poort, The Netherlands, in October 1997, with 20 participants present and 59 others following the electronic conference on e-mail. A 5-member board was elected, consisting of Arthur Dahl (Switzerland), Sylvia Karlsson (Sweden), Irma Allen (Swaziland), Les Gornall (Northern Ireland) and Michael Richards (England). IEF was originally modelled on the ebbf statutes and purposes, although this was modified following guidance from the Baha'i World Centre. Today, the IEF membership is over 300 in 66 countries on all continents on its active distribution list. A Directory of Members is available at <http://iefworld.org/director.htm>. While it does not track this in its statistics, most members are Baha'is professionally involved in the environment and sustainability.

LEGAL ORGANIZATION, PURPOSE AND ADMINISTRATION

Both organizations were formed in consultation with, and with guidance and encouragement from, the Baha'i World Centre, and they continue to be attentive to the evolution of the Baha'i community and to be sensitive to its needs, while directing their attention towards their own professional fields. Both have expressed their Baha'i inspiration in their statutes and function by Baha'i principles.

ebbf

In 1993, ebbf registered as an association in France under the Law of 1901. Its organs are the annual General Assembly and a Governing Board of 7 members elected annually that generally meets 3 times per year. Its members this year (2015) are Stephanie Akkaoui Hughes, Arthur Dahl, Paul Hughes, Mika Korhonen, Françoise Le Goff, Wendi Momen and Mahmud Samandari. The General Assembly meets once a year during the Annual Conference, elects the Governing Board, and defines the general policy and strategy of the organization on the recommendation of the Governing Board.

The Governing Board is responsible for:

- empowering Members to make a values-based difference in their own work environment,
- promoting a new paradigm of business,
- actively collaborating with other networks and organizations having similar goals and values,
- educating the leaders of tomorrow,
- nominating members of the Advisory Council,
- setting guidelines for the Operational Teams,
- any other activities that would assure the achievement of the organization's objectives.

In addition to the Governing Board, ebbf has an Advisory Council, a secretariat in Madrid headed by Director-General Daniel Truran (the only employee of ebbf), and operational teams dealing with accompaniment, communications, external affairs, research, capacity building, finance and fundraising, governance, events, and membership services.

ebbf has recently redefined its vision, core values and operational concepts. Its vision defines ebbf as a Baha'i-inspired global learning community, that accompanies mindful individuals and groups, through daily work and discourse, to transform business and the economy, thereby contributing to a prosperous, just and sustainable civilization. For each of its seven foundational principles of unity, justice, service, moderation, gender equality, human nobility and sustainability, and operational concepts or tools of consultation, collaboration, accompaniment, ever-advancing learning, a new work ethic, ethics in business, a new paradigm of economics, a learning community, and responsibility (<http://ebbf.org/resources/knowledge-network/the-7-ebbf-core-values/>), it has prepared a selection of quotations from the Baha'i writings and statements to illustrate the sources of its Baha'i inspiration, "The ebbf Way". This, together with the 2012 OSIED document on Social Action, were the basis for a recent consultation before its May 2015 event, with forty of the most active ebbf members, including many who are not Baha'i, that has empowered them to an even higher level of activity. ebbf has now set a goal, following the example of the Baha'i community, of trying to increase its impact by two orders of magnitude from the 10,000 reached each year at present to 1 million over the next ten years.

International Environment Forum

The IEF statutes (<http://iefworld.org/statutes.htm>) were modeled on the ebbf statutes, with some modifications on the advice of the Baha'i World Centre. It was also advised not to

establish national or local branches but to work basically through its individual members. The Governing Board of 7 members, elected annually, meets a few times a year by email, skype and a web-based platform. A newsletter is distributed every month (<http://iefworld.org/newslet.htm>). The annual conferences and General Assembly meetings either are held in partnership with and as part of another meeting, or are self-sustaining through a small registration fee, with an electronic version over the internet so that members and others can participate at a distance and benefit from the results through a detailed conference report. All the details of the administration of IEF, including its conference reports, General Assembly reports, Annual Reports and membership directory are available on its web site: <http://iefworld.org/aboutief.htm>. The present Governing Board consists of Peter Adriance (USA), Arthur Dahl (Switzerland) - President, Emily Firth (Australia) - General Secretary, Duncan Hanks (Canada), Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen (Netherlands), Victoria Thoresen (Norway), and Wendi Momen (United Kingdom).

The organizers of IEF decided to try to function as a virtual organization without collecting dues or being responsible for funds, and therefore not requiring legal recognition, so that its human resources could be devoted to substantive activities. While this is sometimes limiting, such as its inability to take part in European research projects, it has not prevented the organization from functioning for nearly 20 years, and removes any worry of a shortfall of funds.

The IEF promotes the application of spiritual and ethical principles to the challenges of the environment and sustainable development. Its specific objectives and actions include the following:

- Provide a forum for members to deepen their understanding of the social and ethical principles in the Bahá'í Writings and other scriptures that relate to environmental responsibility and sustainable development and to explore the application of those principles in their work and activities;
- Encourage and engage with individuals and other groups and apply collective knowledge for the benefit of society;
- Share knowledge and experience through newsletters and technical and academic papers;
- Maintain a web site of relevant written materials and resources; and
- Promote environmental awareness and sustainable development by developing educational materials through which children, youth and adults are empowered to contribute to practical action.

MEMBERSHIP, ACCOMPANIMENT, PERSONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Both organizations have diverse international memberships, with good gender balance. One of their strengths is to have some members with high levels of professional experience whose reputations build confidence in the organization and who are well-connected with international processes and places of public discourse, alongside younger members ready to do the day-to-day work of the organization. These organizations provide an excellent framework for accompaniment and personal encouragement. Young people have come into the organizations, taken on responsibilities, gained confidence, and grown in their professional stature and impact, while developing research and practice directly or indirectly applying Baha'i principles.

One significant role for Baha'i-inspired professional organizations is to provide an umbrella structure for individual initiatives. Going under the label of an organization can open doors

that individuals could not, or with much less impact. Members can take advantage of the good impression left by other members who have gone before, and in turn leave doors open for those who come after. Sometimes members cannot use their professional title, say as a government or international official, so the organization provides an alternative professional affiliation for their Baha'i-inspired activities. The same can be true for authors of presentations and publications that are not directly part of their work, or where the inclusion of Baha'i references in their paper would be judged inappropriate under their professional affiliation but not when coming from a Baha'i-inspired organization.

Another important role for such organizations is to permit its members to perform services for the organization and society in general without taking individual credit. In professional fields where building a reputation and career are given high importance, it is not always easy to live a life of selfless service. Performing services and making contributions in the name of the organization can help to avoid the spiritual traps of too much personal attention and recognition.

Mentoring, inspiring and accompanying young people on career choices is another important function that is facilitated in Baha'i-inspired organizations. Experienced members provide role models for others, and their stories can be very inspiring. It is easier to see the potential in combining Baha'i and professional orientations, and to seek advice on this if necessary. It is not unusual to encounter people who say that an ebbf or IEF event helped to determine their life path. One ebbf activity is to provide accompaniment to young entrepreneurs trying to launch a new company or consultancy, with advice from its more experienced members. Other more established business people have used members of the ebbf network as consultants to suggest new ways to operationalize Baha'i principles in a business setting, with considerable success.

Over the years, the organizations build a community of trust, where members feel free to discuss religion and spirituality in a professional context and to explore their implications in their working environment. ebbf asks what will you do Monday morning at work after the conference. Young people early in their careers have free access to those who have succeeded in their fields, and older members are inspired by the professional creativity of young people. Members build working relationships that carry on afterwards in research projects or business collaborations.

APPROACH AS BAHA'I-INSPIRED ORGANIZATIONS

Both organizations were created by Baha'is wanting to introduce Baha'i principles into their professional fields, and to build more capacity to do this. Both have used approaches that can be explicitly Baha'i-inspired or more indirect, depending on the target audience. Both are administered as far as possible in a Baha'i way. Both do not focus on the Baha'i community, but on their professional field, although IEF has collaborated on several occasions with national Baha'i communities to organize joint conferences, with the approval of the National Spiritual Assemblies.

Both have collaborated closely with the Baha'i International Community UN Office, assisting with drafting statements, providing members as part of BIC delegations to UN events, and co-sponsoring activities. Both IEF and ebbf were accredited by the United Nations to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, IEF in the science and technology major group and not just an NGO as it was considered a professional scientific organization. Before the WSSD, BIC consulted with the IEF board

on joint planning, two IEF members joined the official BIC delegation of three, and ten other IEF members came to Johannesburg to support a series of IEF/ebbf events at the Science Forum, for the business community, at a university, and in the civil society forum (report at <http://iefworld.org/conf6.htm>). When BIC felt it would be useful to inform National Spiritual Assemblies of some of the ways they could be involved in the WSSD process, but did not feel it was appropriate to put such information on the BIC web site, the IEF prepared such a page on its site and the BIC wrote to NSAs encouraging them to consult the IEF site for more information. BIC has been able to "outsource" to IEF activities that it did not have the resources to do itself, creating a larger critical mass of Baha'i-inspired events with greater impact. IEF was invited by BIC to help prepare the BIC Action Plan on Climate Change requested by UNDP and ARC and presented to Ban Ki-moon at Windsor Castle in 2009.

The WSSD accreditation was renewed automatically for RIO+20 in 2012, where both organizations co-sponsored the BIC side event and organized their own parallel activities at the civil society forum and with the scientific community, and both continue to be on the official UN list of NGOs without being formally accredited to ECOSOC.

To try to maintain coherence with the evolving Baha'i community, we have prepared and updated a joint compilation of whatever guidance from the World Centre to Baha'i-inspired organizations has been available, including to ebbf and IEF directly, as well as some letters to the Rabbanis Trust, Association of Bahá'í Studies-North America, etc.

The International Environment Forum has always been explicit about its Baha'i inspiration, with the sub-title "A Baha'i-inspired organization for Environment and Sustainable Development". Its aim has been to pioneer a values-based Baha'i-inspired approach in the scientific community. Its web site includes all the relevant Baha'i International Community statements, and compilations from the Baha'i writings on various themes relevant to the environment and sustainability, as well as compilations on the environment from some other religious traditions. It has reinforced its credibility by including well-known scientists and academics as speakers at its conferences along side its own members who have built recognized scientific careers, and by presenting papers reflecting Baha'i principles at scientific meetings. Its members' intimate knowledge of the UN system has helped it to make relevant contributions to international discourses, and to be supportive of the broader scientific community in linking science and ethics. Some of this work has been published in academic books and journals. Most of the 120 papers presented at IEF meetings or outside events are also available on the IEF web site: <http://iefworld.org/papers.htm>.

The founding members of the European Baha'i Business Forum, while being very attached to the "Baha'i" in its name as a sign that this was their way of serving the Faith, were more indirect in the content of their activity, developing EBBF core values as the topics through which they introduced Baha'i approaches into the business environment, and making it clear that Baha'i was just a source of inspiration which could easily be shared with others who were not Baha'is. Today about one third of its membership is not Baha'i. Its thinking, based on Baha'i principles, has often been at the cutting edge of discourse in the business community, talking very early of corporate social responsibility, microcredit (Mohammed Yunis is an honorary member), and business ethics, among others, that are now mainstream. It also built its credibility in part through leading members who had many years' experience running companies, advising business, and lecturing at business schools. A number of members have been quite creative in experimenting with Baha'i-inspired approaches in the management and operation of their companies, and as

consultants or business advisers, sharing this experience at ebbf events.

With the recent change in name of ebbf, the board felt that it was important to be more explicit about its Baha'i sources of inspiration. This year, in defining "The ebbf Way" for its members, it included a short compilation of quotations from the Baha'i writings, statements and messages of the Universal House of Justice relating to each principle and concept, and this seems to be well received by all of its members, Baha'i and non-Baha'i.

The organizations are careful neither to give the impression that their contributions represent a Baha'i position, nor to be so indirect in their Baha'i sources of inspiration that they might be accused of hiding ulterior religious motives.

They always pay close attention to any new guidance from the Bahá'í World Centre and to adapt their approaches accordingly, in a humble posture of learning. They are aware that part of their activity is in the area of public discourse that is increasingly becoming the responsibility of Baha'i institutions, although their focus is on their professional fields of interest and is usually international in scope. The collective professional competence of their members allows them to go deeply into the significance of the Baha'i writings for issues in their fields, and to combine this reflection with practical experience in real-world applications. In public discourse, they raise issues for discussion at the interface between problems in their fields and spiritual principles. As in the past, they are always happy to collaborate with Baha'i institutions that request help in preparing their own contributions to public discourse where relevant.

INSTRUMENTS USED

ebbf

The tools that ebbf uses presently include international events, local breakfast events, online hangout events, local action labs, create your dream enterprise accompaniment, membership in the UN Global Compact, research knowledge centres, research publications, and learning experiences. It has an extensive web site (<http://ebbf.org/>) and is active on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. ebbf members offer articles and presentations at over 250 events across 60 countries every year. Titles of recent ebbf publications include: *Purpose Beyond Profit*, *On Corruption and Bribery*, *The Promise of Social Innovation*, *Consultative Decision Making*, *In Search of a New Work Ethic*, *Toward a Partnership of Women and Men*, *Spiritual Values Inspiring a New Work Ethic*, *United Consultation*, and *The Challenge of Sustainable Development and Prosperity*. ebbf has occasionally issued press releases that have been picked up by the major business wire services and gone out to 10,000 users. The ebbf research team looks for new and emerging issues in business and invites members to prepare reports and publications, exploring the writings and guidance for relevant ideas and principles, and sharing experience (<http://ebbf.org/resources/knowledge-network/>).

ebbf presently organizes two main international events each year in different European locations; a Spring event in May with about 80 participants, and its Annual Conference in October with about 150 participants. They have become increasingly participative, with short presentations followed by facilitated discussions, and many workshops. The 25th annual conference will be held in Barcelona in early October 2015.

One significant collaboration is with AIESEC, the international student organization with a strong ethical orientation. ebbf members have served on the AIESEC international

advisory board, helped to train incoming international officers, keynoted at international conferences, and run workshops for and have otherwise supported national chapters. AIESEC leaders often speak at ebbf conferences. A group of former AIESECers in ebbf maintains a working relationship with AIESEC, and encourages its members to join ebbf to continue their ethical orientation after their AIESEC student years.

There has long been an ebbf member in Belgium making ebbf contributions to European Union institutions and the other organizations based in Brussels with interests similar to ebbf.

ebbf encourages its members to initiate their own national or local actions: national ebbf conferences, ebbf breakfasts, action labs (a series of meetings to plan and carry out local actions in the workplace), and other events. Some members are involved in the social enterprise movement and impact hubs to assist start-ups in various cities. A number of members lecture regularly in business schools.

The original intention of ebbf was to remain European in focus as a reasonable scale for its activities, and it tried to encourage the replication of Baha'i Business Forums in other regions, including in the USA, Canada and Southern Africa, but these faded out after a few years. It also tried creating national chapters and appointed national coordinators, without lasting success. Since the ebbf membership is international and the internet allows practical operation at the global level, it is now functioning at that level, and members from various parts of the world attend its meetings. This is probably easier for the highly mobile business community than it would be in other professional fields.

International Environment Forum

As a virtual organization, the IEF has used its web site both to maintain contact with its members and to contribute to public discourse. Membership applications received through the web site or by email are reviewed and approved by the board. Important news items, recently including the UN post-2015 process that the IEF is following and a commentary on the Pope's encyclical on the environment, are posted to the home page and included in the monthly newsletter. The web site (<http://iefworld.org/>) includes a variety of resources, including relevant BIC statements, topical compilations from the Baha'i writings and statements, newsletters, conference reports and papers presented along with audio and video recordings where available, educational materials, administrative documents such as annual reports and General Assembly reports to provide full transparency on its functioning, blogs, etc. There are invariably ten or more visitors at any time on the IEF web site.

The educational materials on the web site include a nine unit interfaith course on the *Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change*, a shorter version in French to contribute to preparations for the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015, training materials on rural environmental management, and a simple course on sustainable development. The IEF partnered with the Wilmette Institute to develop a course on *Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of Humankind*, with all of the faculty IEF members, which is offered every two years. It then adapted its interfaith *Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change* course, which the Wilmette Institute has offered on line several times with NSA encouragement and high participation, including by a group of nuns and a rabbi. In both cases, content developed by IEF has been offered to the Baha'i community under the responsibility of a Baha'i institution.

The IEF is also an official co-sponsor of the University of Geneva Certificate of Advanced Studies in Sustainable Development in which Arthur Dahl has been teaching for the last 11 years. It is an Associated Partner in the Global Ethics Forum organized every year by Globethics.net, alternately in Geneva and in another part of the world.

Apart from its activities on the internet, the IEF organizes an annual conference with the dual aims of taking advantage of opportunities for partnership and discourse, and of building its membership and increasing its impact in different parts of the world.

Annual conferences (see <http://iefworld.org/conferen.htm> for reports) have been held in:

- UNESCO, Paris, France, 10-11 March 2015, with PERL (Partnership for Education and research about Responsible Living) on: "*Ethical Transformation and Education for Service at the Community and Institutional Levels*"
- Toronto, Canada, 7-10 August 2014 with the Association for Baha'i Studies - North America (ABS-NA) on: "*Addressing Sustainability Challenges*"
- Barcelona, Spain, 3-6 October 2013 with ebbf on "*Co-creating Sustainable Wealth: How can we combine ecology and economy?*"
- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 13-22 June 2012 at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) with ebbf and BIC
- Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 10-11 December 2011, with the Baha'i Community of Australia, on: "*Ethical Responses to Climate Change: Individual, Community, Institutions*"
- Brighton, United Kingdom, 15-18 December 2010 with University of Brighton, ESDinds project, on: "*Making the Invisible Visible: An Emerging Community of Practice in Indicators, Sustainability and Values*"
- Washington, D.C., USA, 13-16 August 2009 with ABS-NA on: "*Environments*"
- dePoort, The Netherlands, 18-21 September 2008 with ebbf on: "*Growth or Sustainability? Defining, Measuring and Achieving Prosperity*"
- Ottawa, Canada, 12-14 October 2007, with the Baha'i Community of Canada, on: "*Responding to Climate Change: Scientific Realities, Spiritual Imperatives*"
- Balliol College, Oxford, England, 15-17 September 2006 with BASED-UK on: "*Science, Faith and Global Warming: Arising to the Challenge*"
- Orlando, Florida, USA, 14-15 December 2005 with the Rabbani Trust seminar, on: "*Education for Sustainable Development: The Spiritual Dimension*"
- Thessaloniki, Greece, 15-17 October 2004 with the UNESCO Center for Women and Peace in the Balkan Countries, Aristotle University, and the Greek Directorate of Secondary Education of West Thessaloniki, on: "*Cultivating Sustainable Lifestyles*"
- Orlando, Florida, USA, 17-21 December 2003 with the Rabbani Trust seminar, on: "*To Build the World Anew: Fostering a Bahá'í Approach to Education for Sustainable Development*"
- Johannesburg, South Africa, 27 August-3 September 2002 at WSSD with BIC, ebbf and Stakeholder Forum on: "*Indicators for Sustainability*", "*Value-based Education*", "*Local Science*", and "*Multiple Dimensions of Globalization*"
- Townshend School, Czech Republic, 19-21 October 2001 on: "*Knowledge, Values and Education for Sustainable Development*"
- Orlando, Florida, USA, 12-14 December 2000 with the Rabbani Trust seminar, on: "*Applying the Baha'i Teachings to the Environmental Challenges Facing the World*"
- Sidcot, England, 15-18 August 1999 with BASED-UK on: "*Practical Applications of Spiritual Principles: A Conference on Bahá'í Social and Economic Development and the Environment*"
- de Poort, Netherlands, November 1998 on: "*Sustainable Consumption and the Earth Charter*"
- de Poort, Netherlands, October 1997: "*First International Baha'i Environment Conference*"

The IEF annual conferences have been an important tool to advance its purposes. While only a small number of its members are usually able to attend in person, many more follow by email or through recordings and reports on the web site. The opportunity to partner with other organizations or events greatly increases their impact, and the on-line conference reports and papers are a permanent reference. For example, the 19th IEF Conference was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in March 2015, and consisted of an IEF symposium as one of the featured events at the Partnership for Education and research about Responsible Living (PERL) International Conference, along with some other contributed papers and the IEF Annual General Assembly (<http://iefworld.org/conf19>). Another example is the 2004 Annual Conference on "*Cultivating Sustainable Lifestyles*" in Thessaloniki, Greece. We chose Greece because the Greek NSA had previously invited Arthur Dahl to speak at a nature conservation conference it organized. With one IEF member in Thessaloniki and four others who could travel to Greece, we were able to get the co-sponsorship of the UNESCO office in Thessaloniki, then of Aristotle University hosting the conference, and finally of the local branch of the Greek Ministry of Religion and Education which offered to host the opening session in its own auditorium. Local academics and officials made presentations and over 70 people attended (<http://iefworld.org/conf8.htm>). The 11th Conference in Ottawa, Canada, in October 2007, on "Responding to Climate Change: Scientific Realities, Spiritual Imperatives" organized in collaboration with the Baha'i Community of Canada, was planned both as an event for public discourse and to build the Baha'i relationship with the Federal Government (<http://iefworld.org/conf11.htm>) and led to a series of letters from the Canadian NSA to its local communities encouraging them to consider the environmental dimension of their local activities. Similarly, the 15th IEF Conference on "Ethical Responses to Climate Change: Individual, Community, Institutions" in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, on 10-11 December 2011, was organized by a joint committee named by the NSA of Australia and IEF, and included a Counsellor and an NSA representative among the speakers, to bring the issue to the attention of both the Australian and New Zealand Baha'i communities (<http://iefworld.org/conf15>). Both NSAs encouraged their communities to attend. The New Zealand Baha'is made two half-hour television programmes on the conference for broadcast in New Zealand.

The IEF was the first organization to partner with an ABS-NA Conference in Washington, D.C. in 2009, and again in Toronto in 2014, incorporating its annual conference events into the ABS programme. ebbf has now done the same thing at the 2015 ABS-NA Conference in California through the efforts of some ebbf members in North America.

ACCEPTANCE IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD AND INVOLVEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND CONFERENCES

Learning and action are important complementary activities in the Baha'i community. Following this model, the Baha'i-inspired organizations provide opportunities for consultation, action and reflection among professionals in areas beyond the Baha'i community itself. As small organizations with limited resources, they cannot claim to be widely known, but they have earned the appreciation of those who have encountered them.

United Nations Conferences

When the IEF was accredited by the United Nations to the World Summit on Sustainable

Development in Johannesburg in 2002 in the scientific and technological organizations major group, this opened an opportunity to participate in the high level Science Forum in Johannesburg. Drawing on the professional contacts of IEF members, the IEF proposed a panel on sustainable development indicators including a representative of the UN secretariat in New York; the expert who developed many of the indicators for the European Commission; the former Czech Minister for Environment, Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development and founder of the Environment Centre at Charles University in Prague; and two IEF members. The IEF session immediately followed the opening of the Science Forum, and had a larger attendance. IEF also organized events on education in the civil society forum, on local science at the University of Witwatersrand, and on business (with ebbf and Stakeholder Forum) near the business events, and it shared an exhibit with ebbf at the civil society forum. ebbf was also accredited to WSSD and Rio+20, and organized or cosponsored a parallel event at each conference.

At the Mauritius International Meeting on Small Island Developing States (Port Louis, Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005), the IEF co-sponsored and led a parallel event with the Education Caucus, Stakeholder Forum and other partners, and assisted the Bahá'í Community of Mauritius to prepare a statement for the meeting (<http://iefworld.org/mim05.htm>).

The IEF and ebbf accreditation by the UN for WSSD in 2002 carried on to the following UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) sessions and Rio+20, and gave the organizations higher visibility and credibility. At the 15th CSD in 2007 IEF co-sponsored the Bahá'í International Community side event on "*The Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change*" which was highly successful.

At least 14 IEF members participated in the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, 7-18 December 2009 (<http://iefworld.org/COP15.html>) supporting the efforts of the Baha'i International Community.

The IEF was accredited to the Human Rights Council Social Forum on Climate Change and Human Rights in 2010, and raised the issue of projected high numbers of climate-displaced people and the need to educate receiving communities to see this immigration not as a threat but as a resource and a responsibility (<http://iefworld.org/node/249>). This was inspired by the recognition that the Baha'i core activities building a sense of community among diverse people, often immigrants or other minorities, are a potential response to such problems. The issue has since been taken up by the responsible UN organizations.

Most recently, the IEF has contributed actively to UNCSD (Rio+20) and the post-2015 process. It made submissions to the Bureau for the zero draft before Rio+20, prepared five statements for use at the Rio+20 conference on "*Preparing for Environmental Migration*", "*Principles and Indicators for a Green Economy*", "*Ethical Support to Policy-making*", "*Science and Technology for Community Empowerment*", and "*Youth Need Reasons to Hope from Rio+20*"; contributed to the Sustainable Development Dialogues on line and in Rio, with one proposal selected among the top ten in its dialogue, organized a number of events in collaboration with BIC and the Brazilian Baha'i community, and cosponsored and presented papers at a scientific event in Rio on sustainable production and consumption (<http://iefworld.org/conf16>). It has also made contributions to the UN post-2015 preparations, with one of its proposals featured in a separate box in a UN compilation on Breaking down the silos (<http://iefworld.org/node/641>). The IEF has had a good working

relationship with the representatives of the International Council for Science (ICSU) coordinating the science and technology major group, but these have recently retired or moved on, so that relationship will have to be rebuilt.

The IEF is now working closely with BIC, the US Office of Public Affairs and the representatives for external affairs of the French Baha'i Community to plan Baha'i-inspired activities at the UN Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris in December 2015, and a number of members are ready to go to Paris to assist with these activities.

Other IEF and ebbf partnerships

One IEF board member, Professor Victoria Thoresen of Hedmark University College in Norway, initiated a European Union-funded Consumer Citizenship Network over 10 years ago, which then became the Partnership for Education and research about Responsible Living (PERL) and has grown into a global network of about 150 teacher training colleges, curriculum development units, consumers organizations and other educators, in collaboration with UNESCO and UNEP, now becoming a UNESCO UNITWIN network as well. IEF became an active partner early in its creation, and contributes through PERL to the development of values-based educational materials. At the last PERL technical meeting, 10% of the 60 participants were Baha'is.

While IEF could not formally join the European Union-funded research project on Values-based Indicators of Education for Sustainable Development, 2009-2011 (<http://www.esdinds.eu/>) since it could not receive EU funds without a legal status, Arthur Dahl co-designed the project and was a partner, and IEF co-sponsored the International Conference at the University of Brighton in December 2010 where the project results were presented (<http://iefworld.org/conf14.html>). ebbf was funded by the EU as a project partner and organized subprojects to test values-based indicators in the business community. Other partners included Earth Charter International, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and the Peoples' Theatre youth year-of-service project in Germany, as well as close collaboration with the International Federation of the Red Cross, which is now using the indicators in its youth activities. IEF then led a workgroup in PERL to produce a set of three values-based learning toolkits for secondary schools based on the ESDinds methodology, which have been published by PERL and are available on the IEF web site (<http://iefworld.org/node/665>).

IEF also collaborates since 2008 with the European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD) in Belgrade affiliated with the UN University for Peace, presenting papers at its annual conferences on *Reconciliation, Religious Tolerance and Human Security in the Balkans*. This collaboration was established at the request of the former BIC OPI Office in Paris, to follow up on a relationship it had initiated.

IEF is part of the Geneva Environment Network established by the Swiss government and managed by UNEP for all the intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations in the Geneva area.

ebbf collaborates with many like-minded organizations, including AIESEC International and many national AIESEC chapters, the International Labour Office (ILO) including a joint publication, UN Global Compact, the European Commission, Global Ethics Forum, Net Impact, Progressio Foundation, Transparency International, Triple Bottom Line Institute (TBLI), Women International Network, World Business Academy, and World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Scientific conferences

IEF members have given papers and co-organized sessions at a number of scientific conferences. Some examples are:

- Ethics and Climate Change: Scenarios for Justice and Sustainability, Padua, Italy, 23-25 October 2008, with a paper on "*Science and Religion in the Climate Change Debate: Case study of the Bahá'í Community*" (<http://iefworld.org/ddahl08c.htm>) and another IEF member presenting as well.
- International Scientific Congress on Climate Change, Copenhagen, March 2009, with a paper on the response to climate change from the Baha'i community (<http://iefworld.org/ddahl09a.htm>).
- Planet Under Pressure 2012, London, 26-29 March 2012, organized by the International Council for Science (ICSU) (<http://iefworld.org/node/562>) with several presentations by IEF members.
- Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption, Rio de Janeiro, 13-15 June 2012 (report included in <http://iefworld.org/conf16>) where four IEF members presented papers.
- 3rd Rencontres Internationales de Reims on Sustainability Studies, Reims, France, 18-20 June 2013, with three IEF members participating in this high-level meeting (<http://iefworld.org/node/626>), and an academic book published with key papers (<http://iefworld.org/node/710>).
- Second Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption, Fudan University, Shanghai, People's Republic of China, 8-11 June 2014 (<http://iefworld.org/node/680>) with several papers on values-based indicators.

CHALLENGES

Both ebbf and IEF have faced the challenge of growing beyond the dedicated efforts of the founders and becoming self-sustaining through an active membership. ebbf is further along on this, since George Starcher organized a careful succession strategy to allow others to take on his many roles over several years. IEF is still too dependent on its President (and webmaster), although other members are gradually stepping up to take on continuing activities like producing and distributing the newsletter, or developing and maintaining educational materials on climate change.

While IEF has shown what can be done as a virtual organization without funds functioning primarily over the Internet, this does present some challenges. The IEF Governing Board of seven members has a key role in the organization, but only rarely has been able to hold face-to-face meetings, for many years meeting by email, then pbworks, and now Skype. While the board is re-elected annually at the Annual General Assembly and with email ballots, most members have little chance to get to know other members around the world, and the numbers voting are therefore low. Since members do not pay annual dues, it is not always easy to gauge their involvement. The IEF has not yet been able to develop an effective on-line tool for social networking to compensate for the lack of face-to-face meetings. IEF is continuing its organic growth as more professionals learn about it and are drawn to it, but it takes time for some of them to contribute actively to IEF. There are also a certain number of members (about 10%) who change their email addresses and fail to inform IEF of the change, becoming lost, at least temporarily, to the organization.

ebbf has always been limited by the funds available, particularly with the need to pay its

Director-General. Dues and conference fees only cover a fraction of its annual budget of about \$80,000, supplemented by special contributions from those members who are in a position to provide such support. There are also in-kind contributions from members and their enterprises, and these allow ebbf to keep its operating budget relatively low.

While business is becoming more open to discussion of spirituality, business organizations, academia and intergovernmental forums can have a strong anti-religious bias. According to E.O. Wilson, only 2% of biologists believe in God. In most academic fields, it is unacceptable to quote religious sources directly, and in some fields only references from the peer reviewed literature are acceptable. At the same time it is unethical to use others' ideas without attribution. This puts Baha'is drawing on the writings for inspiration in a quandary, since they cannot reference their Baha'i sources, yet do not want to pass Baha'i concepts off as their own. Sometimes a reference to a BIC statement to the UN can pass. Baha'i experience can also be cited as a case study. It can help if one of the editors of a scholarly publication is a Baha'i or a friend of the Faith. Baha'is and the Baha'i-inspired organizations can also establish a level of trust and a critical mass of participation that builds more openness. Those Baha'is who are more senior in their fields can push the limits, while those early in their careers have to be more careful.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES - HOW TO CONTRIBUTE?

As illustrated above, the Baha'i-inspired professional organizations can open opportunities for public discourse through their own activities and partnerships, and can accompany their members in this process. Their members' professional affiliations provide knowledge of the organizations with which discourse would be desirable and the occasions that may be appropriate. They build a collective knowledge base in their field that goes beyond any one individual and that maintains some continuity over time. They also build supporting tools like publications, web sites and on-line networks that facilitate individual initiatives. The focus is on issues in the professional field, or on educating the public about those issues, offering Baha'i-inspired concepts and tools as a contribution to addressing those issues. This activity is complementary to the public discourse of Baha'i institutions, and can be drawn on to support the latter when appropriate. The experience at United Nations conferences, where the public discourses of the BIC, national Baha'i communities, and Baha'i-inspired organizations have been closely coordinated and complementary, shows that each can reinforce and support the other to their mutual benefit.

For the individuals involved in professional fields such as business and the environment, it helps to have both a deep knowledge of the issues and discourses in the field, and regular study of the Baha'i writings in the search for relevant principles and themes. The Baha'i-inspired organizations encourage this. The BIC statements are also a rich source of materials for public discourse already adapted to debates at the United Nations. Members of both IEF and ebbf have compiled extracts from the writings and statements on themes relevant to their professions, and the compilations on the IEF web site are frequently used by Baha'is, Baha'i institutions and others to prepare their own materials. For contexts where direct references to God and other religious phraseology might raise objections, the essential message can be paraphrased in the language of the professional field as necessary.

Beyond this, the Baha'i message is essentially systemic and integrated, so it helps to develop skills in systems thinking linking Baha'i and professional approaches and their integration in a common conceptual framework. Again, the Baha'i-inspired organizations

can encourage this process in their own fields, while aiming for coherence with what the Baha'i community itself is doing.

It is also necessary to find a suitable audience, and Baha'i-inspired professional organizations are a good channel to do this at their own events, through partnerships with like-minded organizations, and offering speakers at other events. When prominent non-Baha'i speakers are invited to address IEF or ebbf events, they inevitably are exposed to the wider Baha'i discourse. The internet provides further outreach. The Baha'i-inspired organizations may be accepted as partners or contributors where a Baha'i institution, as a religious organization, would not.

As the process of capacity-building for public discourse in the Baha'i community expands, the international Baha'i-inspired professional organizations like ebbf and IEF will continue to complement and reinforce what the Baha'i community itself is able to undertake.