

# Indigenous Peoples

## Knowledge and World Views

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Indigenous

# Indigenous Peoples

Over millennia, humans spread around the world and settled in every place that was habitable, adapting to the local environment and developing physical characteristics like skin colour and a spirituality, culture and way of life appropriate to local conditions and resources.

Bolivia



# Indigenous Peoples

These Indigenous Peoples, native to or born in a land or region, were then confronted by European colonisation, when Europe developed technologies for travel, trade and resource exploitation that allowed them to invade and conquer other regions. The local peoples were labelled as “primitive” or even sub-human, and either enslaved, exterminated or forced to convert and assimilate into the “superior” culture.

# Indigenous Peoples

Today we see that Indigenous ways of life were integrated into where they lived, and they carefully managed their natural environment and resources, with knowledge and values often superior to Western science and our unsustainable practices. This recognition of unity in diversity is part of the transformation that the Bahá'í teachings have called for and an important subject for discourse.

# Indigenous Peoples

In particular, where materialistic societies see nature as something separate to and outside of humans, an externality to be exploited or ignored, most Indigenous world-views see no separation from “Mother Earth” and a spiritual wholeness with the land, sea and all life, bearing a responsibility of stewardship towards the ancestors and for future generations.

Yap

Micronesia



# Unity among all peoples

*The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 129)*



# Unity among all peoples

*Today the one overriding need is unity and harmony among the beloved of the Lord, for they should have among them but one heart and soul and should, so far as in them lieth, unitedly withstand the hostility of all the peoples of the world; they must bring to an end the benighted prejudices of all nations and religions and must make known to every member of the human race that all are the leaves of one branch, the fruits of one bough.*

# Unity among all peoples

*Attach great importance to the Indigenous population of America. ... Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33)*

# Unity among all peoples

A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 39-40)

Tarawa  
Kiribati



# Indigenous World-views

We can see, in the spiritualized utilitarianism of the Bab, as well as in His universal imperatives, that one should take into account not only the interests of human beings, but the interests of all created things because the realm of nature is endowed with moral rights as well as spiritual significance.

(Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p.316)

# Indigenous World-views

Those who study the wisdom, belief systems and spiritual insights of Indigenous peoples recognize that the Earth sustains us all, giving us the gift of life. That gift, like all gifts, requires reciprocity.

(<https://bahaiteachings.org/unity-bahai-faith-indigenous-beliefs/>)

# Indigenous World-views

Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them. If an animal gives its life to feed me, I am in turn bound to support its life. If I receive a stream's gift of pure water, then I am responsible for returning a gift in kind. An integral part of a human's education is to know those duties and how to perform them.

(Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*)

Vinson Brown had a deep appreciation of native American cultures and dreamed of the tribes coming together in unity. With Willy Willoya (Eskimo), another Bahá'í, they wrote *Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian Peoples* (1962) collecting tribal visions of future unity, that influenced Greenpeace.

### ABOUT THIS BOOK AND ITS AUTHORS

An Indian who read this book said: "It makes me feel strange. It makes me proud of my people, but ashamed of my own life and wanting to improve it." A white man who read it said: "I never knew the Indians had such feeling; I never knew they had such strange and wonderful visions. That they tie all together into a meaningful pattern makes me think there is something behind them." Whether you are



The Eskimo, William Willoya, was born and educated in Alaska, but has traveled in Europe and over much of North America, searching for the fulfillment of a wondrous dream. How he found it is part of the story.

Vinson Brown, author of fourteen publisher books, has his M.A. in biology from Stanford University, and has traveled to Asia, Central America, and over much of western North America. He has visited several Indian tribes and studied their thoughts, dreams and customs with understanding and love.



white, Indian or of any other race, you will find in this book a new and exciting way to look at life and a promise of glory and peace for all mankind.

The Oglala Sioux beaded bag shown in the upper right is a unique key to this story, for somehow it started one of the remarkable visions told about in this book and it started an unusual partnership of an Eskimo and a white biologist in writing it.



# WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW

Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian Peoples

WITH FOUR PAGES OF COLOR



William Willoya and Vinson Brown

WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW - Willoya & Brown



# Indigenous World-views

Reviewing historical documentation on the interactions between Indigenous peoples and colonists, we can see that, in every instance, the Indigenous peoples invoked the principle of spiritual unity. They would always kindle the sacred fire and beseech God to bend low and give ear and bless the meeting, so that truth and divine abundance would ensue. Parity in consultation has ever been a requirement for progress and release of the pent-up divine blessings.

(Kevin Locke, <https://bahaiteachings.org/spiritual-destiny-of-indigenous-peoples/>)

# Indigenous World-views

Unfortunately, in the past, this goodwill, based on such good-faith consultation, was reciprocated with deceit and betrayal by the colonizers. Now, in this new day, as the Baha'i teachings define it, the consultative process must be transformed and placed firmly on a heavenly foundation of parity and love — that is, of equality, mutual respect, and true friendship.

(Kevin Locke, <https://bahaiteachings.org/spiritual-destiny-of-indigenous-peoples/>)

Venezuela



# The Challenge of Reconciliation

At the core of European colonization was the “doctrine of discovery,” a precept from the Papacy that, if no Christians lived in a land, the lands were to be considered “discovered” and uninhabited.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

Simply put, the ugly root of this principle was that if there were no Christian inhabitants, then there were no human inhabitants. Consequently, such lands were *terra nullius*, or empty of human beings. ...this racist doctrine justified a process of European settlement... that included subjugating and displacing the diverse Indigenous peoples by imposing massive systems of oppression upon them.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

In conditions of systemic racial oppression, vastly different worldviews and belief systems animate the cultures and ways of life of the colonizer and colonized. As such, not only is there a vastly different experience that informs the development of a vastly different knowledge system, but this takes place in a context where there are already massive differences in how distinct groups interpret reality and share knowledge.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

Cameroon



# The Challenge of Reconciliation

A more fundamental global question... is how to change profoundly entrenched patterns of injustice and forge change that builds cohesion, resiliency, and redress in conditions of diversity and inclusion.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)



# The Challenge of Reconciliation

This is a challenge for humanity everywhere, whether addressing the legacy of slavery and the history of racism in America, or the decolonization of former European colonies in Africa, or addressing the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, or responding to decades or even centuries of oppression and persecution of religious or ethnic minorities in places around the globe.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

Humanity is understood as fundamentally indivisible and interdependent, and there is a responsibility and imperative to manifest that oneness in all our social relations. In such an integrative cosmology and worldview, conflict and violence are anathema, as are prejudice and oppression.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

There exist a responsibility and a necessity to focus on building patterns of unity that make destructive patterns, and the reinforcement of arbitrary distinctions, increasingly difficult and rare. As levels of social cohesion, affinity, and connection are deepened at multiple levels, conditions of individual and collective well-being are increased.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

This Bahá'í vision of unity necessitates recognizing difference. Unity and interconnection do not mean uniformity and sameness, but rather the opposite: complete respect and affirmation of distinctions.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

*Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness.*

(Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p.160, quoted in Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

The Bahá'í writings describe forging this kind of shift—of building new forms of just and cohesive relations between peoples—as extremely challenging, requiring immense personal and collective sacrifice, as work that each and every one of us has a role to play a part in, and as a radical change. This necessary shift is a turbulent transition.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)



Maleita

Solomon  
Islands

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

If justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization—then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging [global] realities have to be recast.

(BIC, *Prosperity of Humankind*, quoted in Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)



# The Challenge of Reconciliation

Addressing the legacy of colonization of Indigenous peoples requires distinct and specific actions. Enduring and systemic injustices must be approached, understood, and challenged on their own terms, with efforts to redress them grounded in the actual experiences and knowledge of those that have endured them.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

Local communities where much of the population, regardless of background, recognizes the roles Indigenous governments must play in stewarding the land, protecting the environment, and maintaining cultural, spiritual, and social traditions, are looking to support those roles as they are filled.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

New  
Caledonia



# The Challenge of Reconciliation

Individuals, often young people, are engaging in social action in their communities and schools to advance reconciliation, for example, by supporting the creation of culturally safe spaces where learning and sharing with Indigenous peoples can appropriately occur.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

To truly reconcile, human beings will also have to forge new spaces and patterns of community at the grassroots, striving to reflect the dynamics of peaceful co-existence and just relations from the beginning.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# The Challenge of Reconciliation

This has to be done consciously, in a learning and humble mode, in which no peoples, worldviews, or knowledge systems are rendered invisible, and hidden, divisive silos are actively and visibly rejected. It is this work that is now emerging and that all of us have the capacity to foster to the best of our abilities.

(Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, *Rising to the Challenge of Reconciliation*, *The Bahá'í World*, 8 January 2023)

# Unity

*O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Prayers)*

Tutuila

American  
Samoa

