



Unity

Oneness of Humankind

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Unity

# Unity

- oneness, being one or single
- being formed of parts that constitute a whole
- thing that forms a complex whole
- harmony, concord between persons, etc.

(Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Why is unity so important?

# Need for Unity

*The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective. I beseech God, exalted be His glory, that He may graciously awaken the peoples of the earth, may grant that the end of their conduct may be profitable unto them, and aid them to accomplish that which beseemeth their station.*

# Disunity

...relations among the three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society—reflect the discord that characterizes humanity's turbulent stage of transition. Unwilling to act as interdependent parts of an organic whole, they are locked in a struggle for power which ultimately proves futile.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2012 – To the Bahá'ís of the World*)



# Disunity

One conspicuous symptom of society's deepening malaise is the steady descent of public discourse into greater rancour and enmity, reflecting entrenched partisan points of view. A prevalent feature of such contemporary discourse is how political disagreements rapidly degenerate into invective and ridicule. However, what particularly differentiates the present age from those that preceded it is how so much of this discourse occurs in full view of the world.

# Disunity

Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial, and the very same tools allow individuals, in an instant, to disseminate more widely whatever catches their attention and to register their support or opposition to various sentiments, whether explicitly or tacitly. The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.

(Universal House of Justice, 1 December 2019 – To all National Spiritual Assemblies)

# Disunity

...An unexpected development can turn an uncontroversial issue into one that divides people along partisan lines, and some of the same unhealthy modes of expression that are common to the political sphere can transfer into other areas of discourse. Especially in the uninhibited realm of social media, wrongs—both real and imagined—are quickly magnified, and a variety of feelings are easily stirred: righteous indignation perhaps, or a desire to promote one's point of view, or an eagerness to be seen as the source of new information.

(Universal House of Justice, 1 December 2019 – To all National Spiritual Assemblies)



# Disunity

Much that is taken to be harmless, or even well-intentioned, is, on closer examination, serving to deepen social divides, fuel differences between opposing groups, and perpetuate disagreements, driving away possibilities for consensus and the search for solutions. If one person's contribution seems provocative or objectionable, reacting to it may have the effect of unwittingly strengthening and increasing the exposure of the original sentiment, and exacerbating matters.

(Universal House of Justice, 1 December 2019 – To all National Spiritual Assemblies)

# A Vision of Unity

The realization of such a vision will require, sooner or later, an historic feat of statesmanship from the leaders of the world. Alas, the will to attempt this feat is still wanting. Humanity is gripped by a crisis of identity, as various peoples and groups struggle to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, they fall into competing ideologies and power struggles.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

# A Vision of Unity

Seemingly countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

# A Vision of Unity

Consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Bahá'í expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019 – To the Bahá'ís of the World)

# Unity

When Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Message to the world in the nineteenth century He made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind was its unification. As He says, *“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”* (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 203) To this day, however, you will find most people take the opposite point of view: they look upon unity as an ultimate almost unattainable goal and concentrate first on remedying all the other ills of mankind. If they did but know it, these other ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease—disunity.

(Universal House of Justice, 8 December 1967 – [To an individual])

# Obstacles to Unity

Alas, notwithstanding the laudable efforts, in every land, of well-intentioned individuals working to improve circumstances in society, the obstacles preventing the realization of such a vision seem insurmountable to many. Their hopes founder on erroneous assumptions about human nature that so permeate the structures and traditions of much of present-day living as to have attained the status of established fact.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2012 – To the Bahá'ís of the World*)



SYSTEM CHANGE  
NOT CLIMATE CHANGE

# Obstacles to Unity

These assumptions appear to make no allowance for the extraordinary reservoir of spiritual potential available to any illumined soul who draws upon it; instead, they rely for justification on humanity's failings, examples of which daily reinforce a common sense of despair. A layered veil of false premises thus obscures a fundamental truth: The state of the world reflects a distortion of the human spirit, not its essential nature.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2012 – To the Bahá'ís of the World*)



# Unity

*O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, CXI)

# Unity

*The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny. If the rulers and kings of the earth... arise and resolve to dedicate themselves to whatever will promote the highest interests of the whole of humanity, the reign of justice will assuredly be established amongst the children of men, and the effulgence of its light will envelop the whole earth.*



# Sources of Unity

*The unity which is productive of unlimited results is first a unity of mankind which recognizes that all are sheltered beneath the overshadowing glory of the All-Glorious; that all are servants of one God; for all breathe the same atmosphere, live upon the same earth, move beneath the same heavens, receive effulgence from the same sun and are under the protection of one God. This is the most great unity, and its results are lasting if humanity adheres to it...*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Source of Unity”, Bahá’í World Faith, p.257-60)*

# Sources of Unity

*Another unity is the spiritual unity which emanates from the breaths of the Holy Spirit. This is greater than the unity of mankind. Human unity or solidarity may be likened to the body whereas unity from the breaths of the Holy Spirit is the spirit animating the body. This is a perfect unity. It creates such a condition in mankind that each one will make sacrifices for the other and the utmost desire will be to forfeit life and all that pertains to it in behalf of another's good.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Source of Unity”, Bahá’í World Faith, p.257-60)*

# Sources of Unity

*In the Word of God there is still another unity, the oneness of the Manifestations of God, His Holiness Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This is a unity divine, heavenly, radiant, merciful; the one reality appearing in its successive manifestations.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Source of Unity”, *Bahá’í World Faith*, p.257-60)

# Unity of Religion

*The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, CX)

# Unity of Religion

*Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth....*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, CX)



# Sources of Unity

*There is also the divine unity or entity which is sanctified above all concept of humanity. It cannot be comprehended nor conceived because it is infinite reality and cannot become finite. Human minds are incapable of surrounding that reality because all thoughts and conceptions of it are finite, intellectual creations and not the reality of divine being which alone knows itself.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Source of Unity”, Bahá’í World Faith, p.257-60)*

# Unity

*Now is the time for the lovers of God to raise high the banners of unity, to intone, in the assemblages of the world, the verses of friendship and love and to demonstrate to all that the grace of God is one. Thus will the tabernacles of holiness be upraised on the summits of the earth, gathering all peoples into the protective shadow of the Word of Oneness. This great bounty will dawn over the world at the time when the lovers of God shall arise to carry out His Teachings, and to scatter far and wide the fresh, sweet scents of universal love.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §7)

# Unity

*In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved. Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were wellnigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable. In this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §15)

# Unity

*And for everyone it is now easy to travel to any land, to associate and exchange views with its peoples, and to become familiar, through publications, with the conditions, the religious beliefs and the thoughts of all men. In like manner all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day.*

*(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §15)*

# Candles of Unity

*...the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved. Verily this is none other but one of the wonders of this wondrous age, this glorious century. Of this past ages have been deprived, for this century—the century of light—hath been endowed with unique and unprecedented glory, power and illumination. Hence the miraculous unfolding of a fresh marvel every day. Eventually it will be seen how bright its candles will burn in the assemblage of man.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §15)

# Candles of Unity

*Behold how its light is now dawning upon the world's darkened horizon. The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned. The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed. The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass. The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the cornerstone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendor.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §15)

# Candles of Unity

*The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race. The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse. Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the Kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá §15)



# UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Rio de Janeiro 3-14 June 1992



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# The oneness of humankind

The foundation of a strategy for the world's population to take on responsibility for its collective future must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind. This may seem simple when we talk about it, but it challenges the way most of our institutions work.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# The oneness of humankind

Adversaries try to win in government and the law. We glorify the struggle between classes and other social groups, and the competitive spirit in much of modern life. Conflict is accepted as the driver of human interaction. It expresses in social organisation the materialistic understanding of life that has come to dominate over the past two centuries.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# The world like a human body

In a letter addressed to Queen Victoria over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh compared the world to the human body. Human society is composed not of a mass of different cells but of associations of individuals, each one of whom has intelligence and will. But the way our body works illustrates how we exist.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# The world like a human body

...unity in diversity. Our body is a whole complex system in which all the cells are integrated, permitting each part to make its unique contribution. No cell lives apart from the body, whether in helping it to function or receiving its share from the well-being of the whole. The purpose of our physical well-being is the expression of human consciousness; that is to say, the purpose of biological development is more than the body and its parts.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# Our emerging maturity

What is true of the life of the individual is similar in human society. The human species is an organic whole, in the lead of evolution. While human consciousness is expressed through all our individual minds and desires, that diversity contributes to our essential unity, different from uniformity.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# Our emerging maturity

Bahá'u'lláh said the people of the world are collectively coming-of-age, and this emerging maturity will express our unity in diversity. Social organisation has moved from family life, to tribes and urban societies, to the nation-state, each stage giving new opportunities to develop human capacity.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)



Unity in Diversity  
International Bahá'í Convention 2023

# Twin process of change

This collective progress has not occurred at the expense of human individuality. As social organisation has increased, we have expanded how we can express our latent capacities. Because the individual and society are in close relation, we need to change both human consciousness and the structure of social institutions. This twin process of change gives us a strategy and purpose for global development. Today that purpose must be to establish strong foundations on which to build a planetary civilization.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)



# Universal laws and institutions

Those who make decisions must accept the concept of the oneness of humanity. The related principles should be taught through both educational systems and the media of mass communication. This process will draw the peoples of the world into the task of setting common goals and working to reach them.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

# Universal laws and institutions

This fundamental change can protect them, too, from age-old ethnic and religious conflict. Only when the inhabitants of the planet become conscious that they are a single people will they turn away from the conflicts of past social organisation and begin to learn to work together and forgive each other. "*The well-being of mankind,*" Bahá'u'lláh writes, "*its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.*"

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995)

**Changeons le système pas le climat**  
*parce que nous aimons notre planète*

# Oneness of Humankind

Ultimately, Bahá'ís believe, the emergence of a peaceful and just social order animated by moral principle is contingent upon a fundamental redefinition of all human relationships-among individuals themselves, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions.

*(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)*

# Oneness of Humankind

In particular, outmoded notions of power and authority need to be recast. A basic reconceptualization of social reality is thus envisioned, a reality that in spirit and practice reflects the principle of the oneness of humankind. To accept that "the body of humankind is one and indivisible" is to recognize that every human being is "born into the world as a trust of the whole."

*(Bahá'í International Community, [Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective](#), 2001)*

# Unity in Action

More apparent today than ever before in human history is one simple truth: that the peoples of the world constitute a single human race living in a common global homeland. The interconnection inherent in this reality is evident on all sides. The lives of multitudes around the world are impacted by agreements reached in far-off capitals and centers of commerce.

*(Bahá'í International Community. 2019. Unity in Action: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda)*

# Unity in Action

Even the greatest beneficiaries of the current global order find their personal circumstances increasingly influenced by the hopes and aspirations—all too often frustrated—of the masses of humanity. The welfare of any one segment of humankind, it becomes clear, is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. This is the foundation for progress and lasting development today.

*(Bahá'í International Community. 2019. Unity in Action: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda)*

# WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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# Unity in Action

Such interdependence, or what we refer to as the oneness of humankind, calls for conscious expansion of the bounds of empathy and concern. Yet dominant currents everywhere are pushing people apart, not drawing them together. Competing ideologies and struggles for power proliferate as various groups strive to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. And rival conceptions about the primacy of particular peoples are advanced to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists.

*(Bahá'í International Community. 2019. Unity in Action: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda)*

# Unity in Action

Agenda 2030 calls for “collaborative partnership” among all stakeholders, it commits signatories to “inter-cultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility.”

*(Bahá'í International Community. 2019. Unity in Action: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda)*

# Unity in Action

This requires the practice of holistic collaboration, inclusive processes, and true compassion across every race, class, nationality, and religion. Decision-making and planning, execution and assessment—every facet of the global development endeavor—must be organized to reflect the conviction that every people has a unique and vital role to play in the advancement of civilization.

*(Bahá'í International Community. 2019. Unity in Action: Reclaiming the Spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda)*