

War and Peace

UHJ to the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - War-Peace

War and Peace

With wars and other violent conflicts raging around the world and even more threatened, it is a challenge for young people to know how to respond from a Bahá'í perspective.

The Universal House of Justice has addressed this in a message from its Secretariat to the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, that trains students, dated 26 May 2024. This class is based on excerpts from this message.

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Response to conflicts

Bahá'í youth are increasingly being confronted by the question of what their response should be to serious conflicts and related humanitarian crises raging in the world.

... the following comments... may be of assistance to Bahá'í youth who are seeking a clearer understanding of the Bahá'í attitude towards various world events in the context of the Teachings.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

The greatest catastrophe

The suffering and bloodshed that are the outcome of conflicts are deeply distressing. Surely, every conscientious soul is pained by such events. As Bahá'í youth will be aware, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly stressed humanity's need for universal peace, and on an occasion referred to war as "*the greatest catastrophe in the world of humanity*".

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Desperate condition of the world

...the House of Justice described its sorrow “at seeing the persistence of conditions and conflicts in the world that create misery and desperate suffering—in particular, at observing the recrudescence of destructive forces that have disordered international affairs while visiting horrors upon populations.” The House of Justice referred again... to the “desperate” condition of the world, before stating that “this demands from every conscientious soul a response.”

Horrific conflicts

Reports indicate that, just in the last few years, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed as a direct result of armed struggle across the world—not only in the wars that fill news bulletins and dominate social media, but also in conflicts that unfold in relative obscurity, yet are similarly horrific for human society. What kind of response can be considered adequate in the face of such destruction of human life?

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Outrage and blame

Popular opinion, especially as expressed online, tends to place the highest value on the expression of outrage and being outspoken. Particular significance is attributed to speaking out about conflicts and related humanitarian crises by making the kind of public statement that apportions blame to one or other government or political entity and condemns them.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Non-involvement in politics

As is well known, Bahá'í institutions do not comment in this way on any ongoing conflict. This stance can only be properly understood in light of the Bahá'í principle of non-involvement in the political affairs of governments.

However, to interpret such a stance as indifference to the suffering being caused by conflict would be unjustified.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Offer hope and unity

The House of Justice has repeatedly drawn attention to conditions in the world and has stressed the responsibility Bahá'ís must feel to labour for the emergence of a peaceful world.

...“heartfelt concern” about humanity’s sufferings “must prompt sustained effort to build communities that offer hope in place of despair, unity in place of conflict.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Humanitarian assistance

It should be borne in mind, too, that Bahá'ís themselves are not unaffected by war—there are Bahá'í communities in many countries where conflicts are now occurring. In such places, despite their limited resources, and at times under extreme conditions, Bahá'ís naturally do what they can to offer humanitarian assistance to those around them, often without drawing attention to their own efforts.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Comfort and support

Bahá'í communities in these circumstances also engage in other constructive endeavours to comfort and support populations that are caught up in strife....

However, it should be evident that a response to the condition of the world that focuses only on treating the symptoms of disunity, but does not address its fundamental causes, would be inadequate.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Profound social change

Resolving deep-rooted differences in society requires the patience to bring about profound social change through the application of moral and spiritual principles. It calls for sustained and sacrificial exertion.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Profound social change

The Nine Year Plan in which the Bahá'í world is now engaged is designed to meet this need.

...the House of Justice refers to the prosecution of the Plan as “the means by which long-term, constructive processes, unfolding over generations, are being set in motion in every society.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Selfless action

Notwithstanding the scale of the challenge involved in realizing this aim, Bahá'ís would be failing in their duty before Bahá'u'lláh to attempt anything less.

...“it is systematic, determined, and selfless action undertaken within the wide embrace of the Plan's framework that is the most constructive response of every concerned believer to the multiplying ills of a disordered society.”

Practitioners of peace

This, then, is what it means for Bahá'ís to take a stand against conflict—to act, in the words of the House of Justice, as “true practitioners of peace”.

“...in purifying the heart and cleansing its mirror from prejudice on the one hand, and in creating the social conditions for peace and unity on the other, every individual has agency and the capacity to play a part.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

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Duty to establish peace

The establishment of peace is a duty to which the entire human race is called. The responsibility that Bahá'ís bear to aid that process will evolve over time, but they have never been mere spectators—they lend their share of assistance to the operation of those forces leading humanity towards unity. They are summoned to be as leaven to the world. Consider Bahá'u'lláh's words:

(UHJ 18 January 2019, in Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Education of the peoples

Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquillity of the children of men. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.

(Bahá'í'lláh, quoted in UHJ 18 January 2019, in Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Commitment by youth

These words of Bahá'u'lláh are of particular relevance to any Bahá'í youth being questioned about their own response to the suffering caused by conflicts in the world. The House of Justice has often celebrated the extraordinary commitment being shown by Bahá'í youth across the world who are proffering the divine remedy that, ultimately, is humanity's only hope.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Commitment by youth

...the House of Justice testifies to “how much vibrancy and strength is generated in any society by its youth being awakened to the vision of Bahá’u’lláh and becoming protagonists of the Plan”. And it calls for “a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Have courage and sacrifice

The efforts of today's young believers, undertaken in the company of many like-minded friends, are of course a continuation of the efforts that have been made through the decades by the followers of the Blessed Beauty, youth and adults alike, who have been inspired by His vision of a united world. These are efforts which have required courage, as well as sacrifice.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Peace a foundation of the Faith

...‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the supreme sacrifices made by so many Bahá’ís for the cause of universal peace: “As ye have no doubt heard, in Persia thousands of souls have offered up their lives in this path, and thousands of homes have been laid waste. Despite this, we have in no wise relented, but have continued to endeavour unto this very moment and are increasing our efforts as day followeth day, because our desire for peace is not derived merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Contribution to discourse

Naturally, there is a clear distinction to be made between expressing political views about an active conflict, which Bahá'ís refrain from doing, and making constructive contributions to the discourses of society, which Bahá'ís are urged to do in an effort to bring insights emerging from the study of the Revelation and from the community's own experience to bear on the problems facing the world.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Avoid controversy

Although some themes of discourse are the focus of such intense controversy and heated political disagreement that they must simply be avoided, there are many important discourses, including broader themes related to peace, to which Bahá'ís can and do make significant and valuable contributions at all levels, from the grassroots to the international stage.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Projects of social action

Bahá'ís also engage in projects of social action, through which, in a myriad ways, issues related to peace, justice, and unity can be practically addressed

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Be a force of constructive change

The 2 March 2013 message of the House of Justice... explores what it means to be “a force of constructive change” and how this relates to the principle of non-involvement in politics. Study of this message will help any follower of Bahá'u'lláh appreciate why certain kinds of action and public statement by Bahá'ís are likely to contribute to unity and why others, however much they might be prompted by sincere concern about human suffering, would risk doing more to deepen and exacerbate the divisions in the world. Discernment is needed to distinguish between them.

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Peer pressure

Let no one be under any illusions that the approach which has been described is easy or simple. The House of Justice is well aware that Bahá'í youth in many parts of the world find themselves facing considerable pressure from those around them to voice their support for one partisan stance or another. Ardent supporters of particular points of view sometimes use the threat of social ostracism as a way to compel others to adopt their political position.

Courage and faith

For Bahá'í youth to not only remain clear in their principles in such circumstances, but also continue to show forth courtesy, kindness, love, and forbearance towards their peers, requires courage and faith, strength of spirit and reliance on God. It also calls for a clear understanding of how Bahá'ís are striving to make a difference in the world.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Avoid discord

...the House of Justice counselled the friends that “vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society’s controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Discover point of unity

“You are among the most active and earnest of humanity’s well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.”

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

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Potential of youth

While the challenge set out above is common to all Bahá'ís, the extraordinary potential that youth possess and the possibilities that are unique to their time of life give them special responsibility. Consider in this light the statement of the House of Justice... that “all must surge, but the youth must soar.” This counsel calls to mind a talk by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He describes how a faithful soul should aspire to flight:

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Aspire to flight

But human flight is through faith. Human flight is through the virtues of the world of humanity. Human flight is through the acquisition of perfections. Human flight is through adherence to the divine teachings. Human flight is through service to the oneness of the world of humanity. Human flight is through heedfulness to the verses of God. Human flight is to become the sign of guidance among the people. Human flight is to become a heavenly standard.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

Aspire to flight

Human flight is to become illumined with the light of truth. Human flight is to be detached from all save God. Human flight is to turn to the Abhá Kingdom. Human flight is to carry out the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in their entirety. It is my hope that ye will all take flight; that your spirits, your hearts, and your minds will soar; and all your conditions will fly upwards. Such is my hope. God willing ye will be aided therein.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)

The promotion of peace

The House of Justice will supplicate in the Holy Shrines on behalf of Bahá'í youth everywhere, that they may be aided through the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh to confidently navigate the issues that occupy the minds of so many of their peers and demonstrate their wholehearted commitment to the promotion of peace for all humanity.

(Universal House of Justice, to ISGP 26 May 2024)