

# Social and Economic Development in the Bahá'í Teachings

Social Action - Concepts and Principles

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action1

From a Compilation by the Research Department of Universal House of Justice - August 2020

# Promote Development

*Promote ye the development of the cities of God and His countries, and glorify Him therein in the joyous accents of His well-favored ones. In truth, the hearts of men are edified through the power of the tongue, even as houses and cities are built up by the hand and other means. We have assigned to every end a means for its accomplishment; avail yourselves thereof, and place your trust and confidence in God, the Omniscient, the All-Wise.*

# Transformation

*... is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude, p. 169)*

# Advancement and Education

*... that which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 73)*

# Wellbeing and advancement

*O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, wellbeing, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 92)*

# Unlocking the doors

*Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 96)*

# Progress, Development, Peace

*The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 129–130)*

# Advancement

*God, the True One, beareth Me witness, and every atom in existence is moved to testify that such means as lead to the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth have been clearly set forth by Us and are revealed in the Holy Books and Tablets by the Pen of Glory.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 130)*

# Service to the human race

*That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 167)*

# Rehabilitate all regions

*This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavour and arise to rehabilitate the conditions in all regions and to quicken the dead with the living waters of wisdom and utterance, by virtue of the love he cherisheth for God, the One, the Peerless, the Almighty, the Beneficent.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 172)*

# The needs of the age

*Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity: Bahá'u'lláh's Responses to Mánikchí Sahib and Other Writings*, par. 1.4)

# Advancement of the World

*It behoveth the loved ones of God to occupy themselves under all circumstances with that which is conducive to the edification of human souls, the advancement of the world of being, and the exaltation of the Word of God, the realization of which dependeth upon the deliberations of the trustees of the House of Justice. Well is it with them that strive to render service to the world of humanity. The influence of these souls will lead the world from hardship to comfort, from poverty to wealth, and from abasement to glory.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Development of Cities

*Once in session, it behoveth them to converse, on behalf of God's servants, upon the affairs and interests of all.... In like manner, they should consider such matters as the refinement of manners, the preservation of human dignity, the development of cities, and the polity which God hath made a bulwark for His lands and a fortress for His people.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Service to the general good

*God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#) (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing 2015), pp. 4–5)*

# Service to the general good

*We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), pp. 4–5)*

# Development and Civilisation

*Exert every effort in the fields of development and of civilization, in the acquisition of knowledge, the increase of trade, the improvement of agriculture and the promotion of modern discoveries.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Progress and Development

*Guide and counsel at all times the friends of God, one and all, to be occupied day and night with that which is conducive to Iran's abiding glory, and to exert the utmost effort and the greatest endeavour in order to refine character and manners, labour assiduously, aim for lofty goals, promote love and affection, and foster the progress and development of industry, agriculture and trade.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Development

*The friends must engage in the work of developing Persia, that is, they must exert great efforts in the promotion of agriculture, industry, trade, education, arts, and sciences.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Higher degrees of civilisation

*They must educate the children and teach them useful arts, reach ever higher degrees of civilization, multiply national crafts and industry, promote trade, improve agriculture, provide learning for all, educate women and honour them, and show consideration for the handmaidens of God. They must strive with heart and soul to create love and unity among the friends, to serve the government...*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

# Responsibilities of Assemblies

The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets will reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality....

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste and creed.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12 March 1923, in *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922–1932*, pp. 37–38)

# Responsibilities of Assemblies

They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development.... They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12 March 1923, in *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922–1932* , pp. 37–38)

# The progress of the world

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the “progress of the world” and the “development of nations” as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

(The Universal House of Justice, message dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

# The progress of the world

The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith.

*(The Universal House of Justice, message dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá'ís of the World')*

# The progress of the world

The beloved Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society. Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unfailing encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause.

(The Universal House of Justice, message dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

# Calls to Success and Prosperity

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has extolled “two calls” to “success and prosperity” that can be heard from the “heights of the happiness of mankind”. One is the call of “civilization”, of “progress of the material world”. It comprises the “laws”, “regulations”, “arts and sciences” through which humanity develops. The other is the “soul-stirring call of God”, on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. “This second call”, the Master has explained, “is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.”

[\(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2008 message to the Bahá'ís of the World\)](#)

# Coherence

As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.

*(The Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2008 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)*

# Discourse and Action

The term “politics” can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá’í community is social transformation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* amply demonstrates the Faith’s commitment to promoting social change without entering into the arena of partisan politics.

(Letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

# Discourse and Action

So too, innumerable passages in the Bahá'í Writings encourage the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world. “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” Bahá'u'lláh states, “and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá urges the friends to “become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace.”

(Letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

# Discourse and Action

Further, in a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi explains that “much as the friends must guard against in any way seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings”.

(Letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

# Discourse and Action

In another letter written on his behalf in 1948, when racial inequality was enshrined in the laws of many states in the United States, he indicates that there is “no objection at all to the students taking part in something so obviously akin to the spirit of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice.” Bahá’ís must, therefore, be tireless in addressing, through word and deed, a range of social issues.

(Letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

# An Example

Social action can take many forms, from grass roots projects in communities, to agricultural development, environmental sustainability, building human capacity through education, to even a building dedicated to community service.



(See <https://iefworld.org/elcHobart>)

# Tasmania Bahá'í Centre of Learning

In Australia, the Bahá'í Centre of Learning is an educational institution reflecting the aspirations of the Bahá'í Faith to actively foster and contribute to the development of a peaceful and sustainable world community.

Established for the use of the people of Tasmania with overarching aspirations for the future, the Centre has incorporated symbolic references to unity and sustainability in its design and construction. It includes a domed main auditorium, a domed Tranquillity Room, smaller meeting rooms, and spaces conducive to contemplation and repose, with a reading room, library and scenic bay window seats. It provides a self-sustaining facility that will last for many generations, and will also be substantially recyclable in the future.

Bahá'í  
Centre of  
Learning,  
Tasmania



# Tasmania Bahá'í Centre of Learning

The Centre was opened on 4 June 2009 in the presence of the governor. The kite-shaped double-glazed skylights in the dome provide natural lighting to the main auditorium. The dome design integrates both passive and active control systems for regulating the internal temperature and allows warm air at the top of the dome to circulate to lower and cooler areas through a heat stratification system. In the event of over-heating vents in the dome open up and warm air is vented upwards through natural convection. The extensive insulation, double-glazed windows and polished concrete floor provide for passive solar heating, minimal heat loss and reduction in traffic noise.

Bahá'í  
Centre of  
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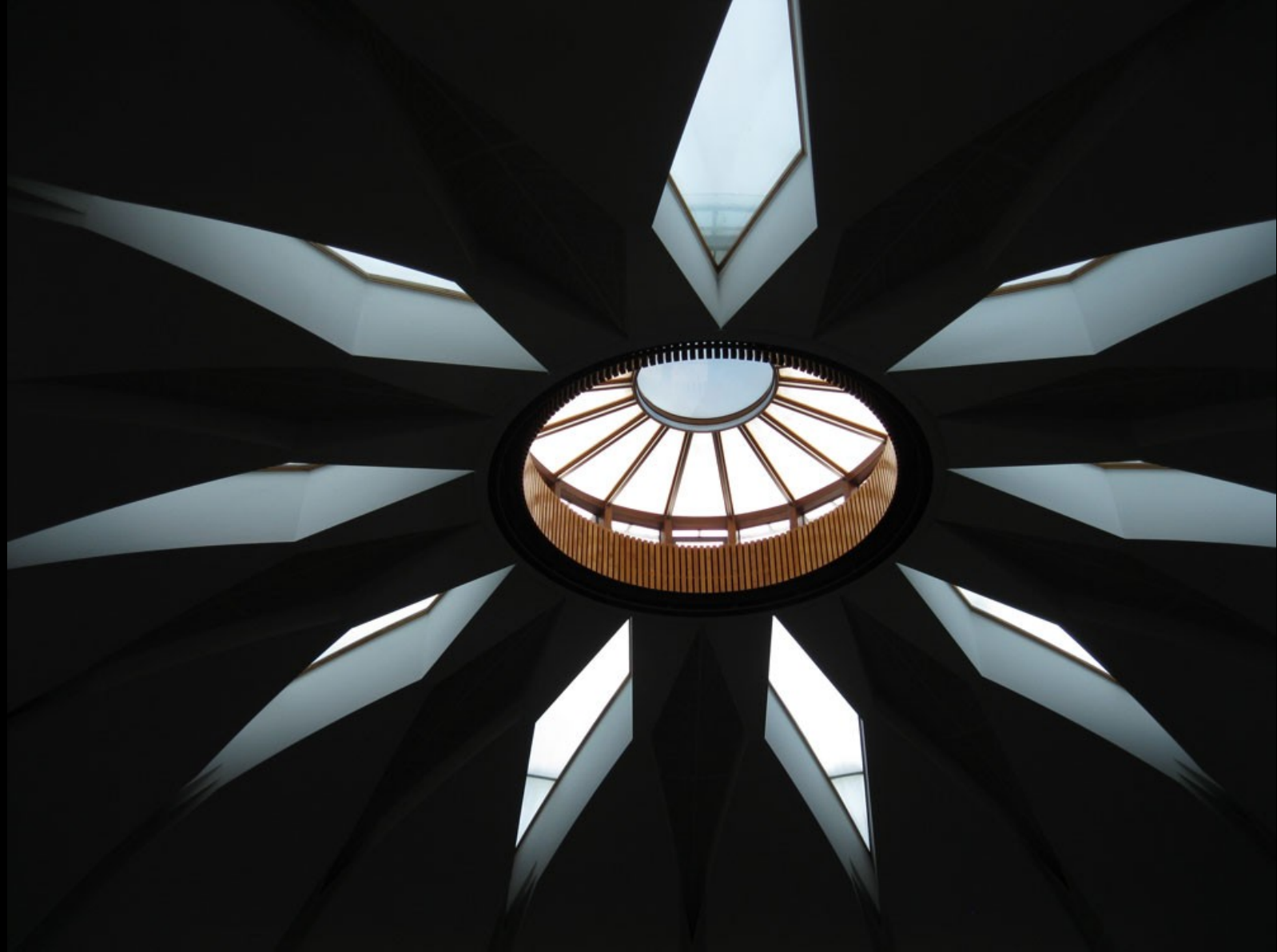


# Tasmania Bahá'í Centre of Learning

The 9 points of the crowning dome converge towards its centre, expressing the concept of a single unifying connection.

Contributing to the strength and beauty of the crown, they also reflect the aim of the Centre to bring people together regardless of differences of opinion, thoughts, beliefs, religion, or culture. The logo of the Centre continues the theme of unity and connectedness. It is reproduced in stainless steel encased in the naturally-polished black concrete floors of the Auditorium and Tranquillity Room. This construction also incorporates principles of advanced energy efficiency. Air-tight construction minimizes heat loss while insulation in the roof and walls is entirely recycled newspaper.

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Centre of  
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# Tasmania Bahá'í Centre of Learning

The majority of timber used is either recycled or plantation grown. Trees were not removed from the original building site. A plane tree in the middle of the site was encapsulated in the foyer and now springs from the central atrium allowing light and ventilation while filtering the noises of the city. The landscaping uses native Tasmanian flora. Materials used, such as stone, stainless steel, aluminium and timber, were in as close to their natural state as possible. All interior surfaces have been finished with natural paints. To meet future demands for water, 50,000L capacity tanks have been installed below-ground to collect and store rain from the roofs.

(See <https://iefworld.org/elcHobart>)



Bahá'í  
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