



ONE COUNTRY

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" – Bahá'u'lláh

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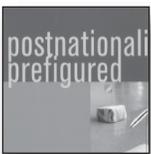
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David Ngakele, pen and paper in hand, zone coordinator for APRODEPIT, examines the initial catch of fish in the village of Kodjoguila after some eight months of conservation measures.

WALTAMA, Chad — As a maker and seller of fishing nets, Ali Mahamat knew all too well that fish were slowly disappearing from the Chari River here in the southern region of this sub-Saharan African nation.

"Fifteen years ago, the fishing was good," said Mr. Mahamat. "But it gradually died out to the point where there was practically nothing."

Until a few years ago, Mr. Mahamat concedes, he inadvertently contributed to the die-out. In what he now realizes was a misguided effort to help fishermen here, he sold nets with increasingly smaller mesh, designed to catch the few immature fish that remained.

Then, one day, he tried to sell his nets to the fishermen of this village, located about 70 kilometers southeast of Sarh, the regional capital. But the fishermen here had other ideas. They had organized into a community-based group to revive the fishing and they had become serious about enforcing game laws.

"They said I can't sell small nets here," said Mr. Mahamat. "They said I could only sell nets with large mesh. They said it was to protect the fish."

Today, because of actions like that, the fish are returning to the Chari River in the Sarh region — as are other signs of prosperity. Much of the credit goes to APRODEPIT, a Bahá'í-

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For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of the Bahá'í International Community and its work, please contact:

ONE COUNTRY
Bahá'í International
Community - Suite 120
866 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
U.S.A.

E-mail: 1country@bic.org
<http://www.onecountry.org>

Executive Editor:
Ann Boyles

Editor:
Brad Pokorny

Associate Editors:
Galina Tumurova (Moscow)
Christine Samandari-Hakim
(Paris)
Kong Siew Huat (Macau)
Guilda Walker (London)

Editorial Assistant:
Veronica Shoffstall

Design:
Mann & Mann

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The Individual and Social Action

[Editor's note: The following was adapted from a longer article in the 2002-2003 edition of *The Bahá'í World*. The complete article can be found on page 199 of that edition or at www.onecountry.org/e154/Social.pdf]

A growing number of people all over the world, believing that powerful global forces have ignored the well-being of average citizens in favor of the interests of big businesses, transnational corporations, governmental elites, war machines, ecological destruction, and other evils, are taking to the streets to protest. They see their governments as failing, their livelihoods and ways of life threatened, and convincing evidence of social injustice.

The main flashpoint for the widespread protests has been "globalization," a phenomenon with two distinctly opposite effects. On the one hand, it has served to integrate peoples and countries through "the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders," according to Joseph E. Stiglitz.

On the other hand, its detractors say globalization's economic aspects have had devastating consequences by promoting a regime of deregulation that benefits the rich at the expense of the poor — a trend that some statistics bear out. In 2003, for example, 54 countries were poorer than they had been 10 years earlier, and more than half of the world's largest 100 economies are now corporations, rather than nation-states.

Naomi Klein, one of the most vocal spokespeople for the anti-globalization movement, sees the failure of governments to take an active role in guarding the welfare of their citizens in this scenario as a "betrayal" of "the fundamental need for democracies that are responsive and participatory."

It is no wonder, then, whether they are troubled by the hardship resulting from the actions of multinational corporations, worried about the alarming deterioration of the environment, horrified by the worsening plight of the world's poor, or angered by their

government's participation or nonparticipation in various military interventions around the world, that a growing number of people are searching for ways to make themselves heard and to make a difference.

There is much debate about the best way to move forward, however. While some advocate the slow route of pursuing reforms within existing legal or administrative avenues, others favor direct action as a faster, more efficient way to remedy social ills.

Ms. Klein argues that "a new culture of vibrant direct democracy is emerging, one that is fuelled and strengthened by direct participation, not dampened and discouraged by passive spectatorship."

This increasing emphasis on direct democracy reflects both widespread disillusionment with established political systems and the conviction that the "self-actualizing" power of the individual is the strongest means of effecting change and bringing about social justice. According to individualist and anarchist social theories, to which the anti-globalization movement bears some relation, the state and society block the power and "natural energies" of individuals through their perpetual efforts to control them.

"Cultural common sense leads many to believe that the best way to organize every social institution is in the form of a contest," notes Michael Karlberg of Western Washington University. "Paradoxically, it also leads many to believe that the best way to reform those institutions is through protest — and other adversarial strategies of social change. Protests, demonstrations, partisan organizing, litigation, strikes, and other oppositional strategies are standard methods for pursuing social change. In more extreme cases, violence and terrorism are also employed."

Underlying the various paradigms encompassed by this approach is a long-standing conviction that attacks on the "other" — whether governments, corporations, or institutions — are the most effective means for accelerating change in society.

But can a movement based on adversarial strategies sustain unity within its own ranks — or engender a society that can meet the needs of all its members?

“If they were viable in the past, they now appear to have reached a point of diminishing returns,” writes Dr. Karlberg. “Adversarial strategies legitimate the assumptions regarding human nature and social organization that sustain the tripartite system. When social activists engage in partisan political organizing, they legitimate the contest models of governance that keep them at a perpetual disadvantage. Likewise, when social activists engage in litigation, they legitimate the adversarial systems of jurisprudence that keep them at a perpetual disadvantage. Even street protests, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience legitimate the underlying assumption that contest and opposition are necessary forms of social interaction.”

Too often, as well, the root causes of activists’ concerns largely remain unaddressed.

Within this wider context, the Bahá’í community, which is also concerned with addressing the ills that beset society, sees itself as making a number of contributions to the struggle for social transformation — but with a distinctive vision and approach based on its sacred scriptures. A basic tenet of Bahá’í belief is that humanity, standing on the threshold of its collective maturity, must develop appropriate new qualities, attitudes, and skills that can carry humanity beyond the simplistic and limited conviction that human beings are aggressive and quarrelsome by nature and can only progress through the adversarial pitting of “us” against “them.”

For Bahá’ís, conflicts can best be resolved — and social transformation accomplished — through a new paradigm of unity and cooperation based on the recognition of humanity’s underlying oneness. It is a vision of human unity that also stresses the importance of humanity’s spiritual nature.

Accordingly, Bahá’ís seek to solve social problems by attempting to address what they see as the spiritual root of the problem facing humanity — its failure to recognize and wholeheartedly embrace the oneness of the human race.

But if adversarial relationships are taken for granted as the norm of operation in society, how can we move from the current model of “containment,” where institutions are seen as controlling and limiting the freedom of individuals, to a model of empowerment?

The new paradigm advanced by the Bahá’í Faith focuses on empowering individuals to become agents of constructive social change in their communities, or, in the words of one writer, on “cultivating the ca-

capacity in individuals and their institutions to participate in their own development.”

The Bahá’í view of change as organic in nature provides a perspective that allows the community to pursue it through established, lawful channels. Just as a human being must traverse numerous stages from infancy to adulthood, the political world “cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment,” according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Outside the adversarial “contest” paradigm, the Bahá’í community is devoting its energies to building communal patterns to encourage the development of “those means that will conduce to progress.” While still very young, the community is gaining valuable experience in nurturing “learning organizations” at the grassroots level and in empowering both individuals and institutions to walk their own path of development.

The maturation of democratically elected Bahá’í governing bodies at the local level and the progress of a worldwide system for training human resources both offer encouraging evidence of those patterns within the Bahá’í community itself. Bahá’ís are also seeking ways to offer the insights and skills inspired by their beliefs to the wider community, notably through social and economic development efforts around the world.

This recognition that spiritual transformation needs to be the foundation of lasting material improvements is central to the Bahá’í approach to social change. “Humanity’s crying need will not be met by a struggle among competing ambitions or by protest against one or another of the countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age,” writes the Universal House of Justice. “It calls, rather, for a fundamental change of consciousness.” “[E]ach human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.”

In the end, then, the temporary overlapping of individualistic agendas or ephemeral political alliances common to most protest movements cannot lead to lasting change. If, however, change springs from a conviction that humanity is one, and that both individuals and institutions play reciprocal roles in serving humanity, then it will endure.*

How can we move from the current model of “containment,” where institutions are seen as controlling and limiting the freedom of individuals, to a model of empowerment? The new paradigm advanced by the Bahá’í Faith focuses on empowering individuals to become agents of constructive social change in their communities.

In the advancement of women, men are increasingly seen as important partners

At this year's session of the Commission on the Status of Women, more men than ever stepped forward in a spirit of partnership to advocate for the rights of women. In so doing, they helped promote a new model of masculinity.

Bani Dugal, left, chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, at the daily briefing for NGOs on 2 March 2004, with Shifra Hadi Al Hamandi, center, and May Mohammad Ali, both professors from Iraq.



UNITED NATIONS — As the founder of the South African Men's Forum, Mbuyiselo Botha might certainly have felt a bit out of place here at the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

One of the world's foremost forums for the discussion of women's rights and advancement, the CSW has traditionally been attended primarily by women and representatives of women's groups.

But Mr. Botha felt entirely at home. In South Africa, he and his organization have won a reputation as staunch advocates of women's rights — and particularly as opponents of violence against women.

Mr. Botha's presence and his level of comfort were signs of the increasing recognition in international circles that women's full advancement can only come with the participation — and transformation — of men.

At the 48th Session of the CSW, held here 1-12 March 2004, more men than ever stepped forward in a spirit of partnership to advocate for the rights of women. In so doing, they helped promote a new model of masculinity.

"For the first time you are seeing [at the

CSW] the involvement of men not as tokens, but as full-fledged participants," said Mr. Botha. "It is also empowering to men that together men and women can destroy the back of this disease, violence against women. When women are oppressed, men are oppressed as well."

Recognition of "the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" was one of the two main themes at this year's CSW. The other main theme concerned women's "equal participation" in conflict prevention and peace-building.

In resolutions adopted at the end of the meeting, governments emphasized the key role of men in supporting women's advancement — and also the importance of involving women in the settlement of conflict.

"The Commission further recognizes that everyone benefits from gender equality and that the negative impacts of gender inequality are borne by society as a whole and emphasizes, therefore, that men and boys, through taking responsibility themselves and working jointly in partnership with women and girls, are essential to achieving the goals of gender equality, development, and peace," stated the Commission.

In regard to the settlement of conflict, the Commission said: "To achieve sustainable and durable peace, the full and equal participation of women and girls and the integration of gender perspectives in all aspects of conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building is essential. Yet women continue to be under-represented in the processes, institutions and mechanisms dealing with these areas."

The documents go on to recommend a series of steps at the international, national and local levels to promote gender-sensitive education and other programs "to accelerate a socio-cultural change towards gender equality" — and to better involve women in conflict resolution and peace-building.

This year's CSW was also significant as a



Zarin Hainsworth-Fedai, of the Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom, left, leads a workshop on "The Role of Men in Overcoming Challenges to the Advancement of Women" as a side event to the CSW on 4 March 2004.

lead-up to next year's meeting, which will feature an overall review of progress since the 1995 Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing.

Behind the scenes, a large number of delegations agreed in principle not to re-open negotiations on the Beijing Declaration — a document that reaffirms the international community's commitment to promoting equal rights for women at the global level.

"This is very important," said Bani Dugal, chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. "Many NGOs have been worried that some governments might re-open negotiations next year in an effort to roll back some commitments. Formally, this decision is not part of the agreed conclusions, but the indications are that governments intend to focus only on implementing current agreements, and not changing the underlying principles."

Ms. Dugal, who is also the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, said governments had agreed to include the expanded use of interactive dialogues with the broad-based participation of governmental delegations, UN agencies and civil society at next year's meeting.

"Our goal over the next year, as NGOs concerned with the advancement of women, is to mobilize and re-energize women's movements at all levels, particularly at the grassroots, to be well prepared to participate in all aspects of next year's 10-year review," said Ms. Dugal.

NGO participation was strong at the CSW this year. More than 2,200 people from some

400 NGOs were registered, according to Tsu-Wei Chang of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women.

While statistics were not available, a noticeably larger percentage of males attended this year, in part because of the thematic focus on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.

Some NGO participants questioned the inclusion of men in the process, concerned that it would divert precious resources from women's development organizations. Others worried that men, by virtue of their acculturation, would not be able to empathize with the plight of women.

"Many hold the view that because men and boys are the beneficiaries of male privilege and the discrimination against women and girls, they can never fully understand our struggle," said Njoki Wainaina, founder of Men for Gender Equality Now, a Kenyan NGO, in a panel discussion at the opening session.

However, she added, "as the understanding of gender dynamics, their social construction, masculinity, femininity and their impact on all groups in society deepens, it becomes clearer that males have many reasons to want to change, and that gender equality would have benefits for them, and for all the groups in society.

"The focus on the girl child since the Beijing Conference has particularly challenged men to look at the boy child," said Ms. Wainaina. "In several countries in Africa, gender programs are targeting boys because of the recognition that boys too suffer certain gender specific problems, especially

"Many hold the view that because men and boys are the beneficiaries of male privilege and the discrimination against women and girls, they can never fully understand our struggle."

**— Njoki Wainaina,
founder of Men for
Gender Equality
Now**

arising from their socialization.

“There is, for example, growing concern that while girls have been overburdened with family responsibilities as helpers to their mothers, boys are growing up without learning and taking their responsibilities at their personal, family and community levels,” said Ms. Wainaina. The result is an increase in drug abuse, violence, crime and other social problems — a high social cost for the community, she added.

In its conclusions on the importance of women in conflict-resolution and peace building, the Commission called for a greater effort — and more resources — to ensure that women and women’s organizations are involved in ending and healing war and conflict.

“The realization and the achievement of the goals of gender equality, development and peace need to be supported by the allocation of necessary human, financial and material resources for specific and targeted activities to ensure gender equality at the local, national, regional and international levels as well as by enhanced and increased international cooperation,” said the Commission.

The Commission further noted the “differential impact” of armed conflict on women and girls, and called for measures to prevent and to punish sexual violence and trafficking arising from conflict and post-conflict situations.

Related to this, much discussion this year centered around the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000. That resolution makes women, and a gender perspective, relevant to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peacekeeping operations and reconstructing war-ravaged areas.

It is the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women’s contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. Moreover, as international law, it is binding on the members of the international community.

“We have to leave the era where gender is incorporated in an ad hoc manner,” said Noeleen Heyser, executive director of UNIFEM USA. “It is not enough to say gender has to be mainstreamed. There need to be the necessary institutional mechanisms and the necessary resources, not from voluntary funds but from designated sources.”

In many of the NGO workshops and side events at the Commission, the role of reli-

gion became a focus of discussion. Among the some 176 events sponsored by NGOs, for example, there were workshops sponsored by the Anglican Consultative Council, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, the Franciscans International, the International Islamic Committee for Women and Children, and the Quaker United Nations Office.

The Bahá’í International Community sponsored a workshop entitled “The Role of Men in Overcoming Challenges to the Advancement of Women.” And in its statement to the Commission, the Bahá’í International Community also stressed the importance of involving men in the process of women’s advancement.

“The full development of men and boys is inextricably linked to the advancement of women,” said the Bahá’í statement. “A society characterized by gender equality serves the interests of both sexes. It enables men and women to develop in a more balanced and multifaceted way and to discard the rigid role stereotypes so crucial to shifting family dynamics, and to accord women full access to the world of work.

“Enduring change comes through cooperative activity of men and women rather than through confrontation. Hence, we call upon all members of society to encourage and support women to develop their full potential and to strive for their equality and human rights and we recognize that much more can be accomplished in the long run if men and women work together.”*

– With reporting by Veronica Shoffstall

“Women Helping Women” award

NEW YORK — The Principal Representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, Bani Dugal, has received a “Women Helping Women” award from Soroptimist International.

The award came in the weeks leading up to International Women’s Day on March 8, an occasion which is widely observed by Bahá’í communities throughout the world.

“Women Helping Women” is one of three awards offered under an umbrella program, “Making a Difference for Women,” established in 1986 by the Soroptimists to acknowledge those who work to improve the status of women in society. Soroptimist International is a 70-year-old volunteer service organization for women.*

“We have to leave the era where gender is incorporated in an ad hoc manner. There need to be the necessary institutional mechanisms and the necessary resources, not from voluntary funds but from designated sources.”

**– Noeleen Heyser,
executive director
of UNIFEM USA**

Bahá'í holy site destroyed in Iran

NEW YORK — Government authorities in Iran have destroyed yet another Bahá'í holy site, the Bahá'í International Community learned in April.

The gravesite of Quddús, a prominent figure in early Bahá'í history, has been razed to the ground, despite protests from Bahá'ís at the local, national, and international levels.

“The destruction and desecration of this holy place were carried out with the knowledge of the national government to which appeals had been made beforehand,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

“This act represents yet another example of the ongoing persecution against Iran’s 300,000-member Bahá'í community, utterly contradicting the government’s claim that the human rights situation in Iran is improving,” said Ms. Dugal.

Destruction of the gravesite, located in the city of Babul, began in February but was temporarily halted after local Bahá'ís demanded to see a legal permit for the demolition work.

The Bahá'ís were referred to national authorities and for a time it appeared that the desecration had been halted. More recently, it was discovered that the dismantling of the gravesite had continued surreptitiously over a period of days until the structure was entirely demolished.

The house-like structure marked the resting place of Mulla Muhammad-'Ali Barfurushi, known as Quddús (The Most Holy). Quddús was the foremost disciple of the Báb, the Prophet-Herald of the Bahá'í Faith.

“It would be the least that the Government could do at this point to return to the Bahá'í community his sacred remains,” said Ms. Dugal. “We ask for the international community’s support in this goal.”

Ms. Dugal added that the destruction of the gravesite came soon after the international community failed this year to offer a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran was founded in 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have

been killed by the Government. Hundreds more have spent time in prison and thousands have been deprived of education, property, and employment, solely because of their religious belief.

As well, a number of Bahá'í holy sites and cemeteries have been destroyed under the regime. In March 1979, the house of the Báb, the holiest Bahá'í shrine in Iran, was turned over by the Government to a Muslim cleric known for his anti-Bahá'í activities. In September that year, the house was destroyed by a mob led by mullahs and officials of the Department of Religious Affairs.

The House of Bahá'u'lláh in Takur, where the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith spent His childhood, met a similar fate: it was demolished and the site was offered for sale to the public. In Teheran and other cities throughout Iran, Bahá'í buildings were looted and burned, Bahá'í cemeteries were bulldozed and Bahá'í graves were broken open. In the Teheran area, the Bahá'ís were forced to bury their dead in a barren stretch of land reserved by the authorities for “infidels.” Having access to their own cemeteries is especially important to Bahá'ís because, as might be expected, they are not allowed to bury their dead in Muslim cemeteries.

The most egregious forms of persecution, such as the killings and imprisonments of Bahá'ís, have abated in recent years in the face of increasing international outcry, such as a series of resolutions in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) expressing concern over the treatment of Bahá'ís. However, the confiscated holy sites, graveyards and other properties have not been returned. Work and educational opportunities likewise remain limited.

Over the last two years, as well, the UNCHR has failed to pass such resolutions owing to efforts by Iran to pursue a “dialogue” with Western nations.

“Unfortunately,” said Ms. Dugal, “the Bahá'ís of Iran still face, day after day, systematic deprivation of their rights as Iranian citizens — not only in terms of their civil and political rights, but also in terms of their economic, social and cultural rights.”*

“This act represents yet another example of the ongoing persecution against Iran’s 300,000-member Bahá'í community, utterly contradicting the government’s claim that the human rights situation in Iran is improving.”

**— Bani Dugal,
representative of
the Bahá'í
International
Community to the
UN**

In Chad, a project to promote sustainable fishing yields extra dividends

In the village of Waltama, the women's group has organized a literacy class, one by-product of APRODEPIT's process of community-based consultation.



APRODEPIT provides training in improved fishing practices, fish farming, and the preservation of fish through smoking and curing. It has helped to organize more than 140 community groups and fostered the establishment of community-based schools, women's literacy classes, and village granaries.

APRODEPIT, continued from page one inspired non-governmental organization that has worked here for more than a decade to promote a variety of community-based, sustainable development practices.

Based in Sarh, APRODEPIT's outward focus is to provide communities with training in improved fishing practices, fish farming, and the preservation of fish through smoking and curing. It also promotes composting, arboriculture, reforestation, and wildlife protection.

Along the way, APRODEPIT has helped to organize more than 140 community groups in the region — and dozens more in areas near N'Djamena, the national capital. Further, because of APRODEPIT's distinctive participatory methods of community organization and consultation, a number of the groups have branched out into other endeavors, such as the operation of community-based schools, women's literacy classes, and village granaries.

"In reality, the training we give emphasizes how communities can develop themselves," said Yam-bel-yam Kosse Malla, the

founder and director of APRODEPIT. "Our underlying idea is to promote an organic process of community development.

"They start with fish farming, and they harvest the fish. Then they realize they have more money but their children aren't educated. So they decide to create a community school. Next, perhaps, they realize they have a problem with health. So we assist with health education. And by following this system, the village gradually raises itself up," said Mr. Kosse Malla.

This approach has certainly worked in Waltama, which formed its first group in 1995 and has since instituted a variety of sustainable fishing efforts, established a village school, created a village granary, and, most recently, launched a program of literacy classes for women.

"The groups are really helping the village from my point of view," said Gastone Allada, 70, the chief of Waltama, who also acknowledged APRODEPIT's crucial role in the process. "Before, there was no fish; now there is fish. Before there was no school; now there is a school. So I am very happy."

Located in the heart of sub-Saharan Africa, Chad ranks as one of the world's poorest countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) lists it as the 11th least developed nation in the world in its 2003 Human Development Report.

According to the UNDP, the average Chadian subsists on less than US\$3 per day. The adult literacy rate for men is 53 percent — and for women 36 percent. And some 73 percent of the population goes without sustained access to good quality water.

The overall situation in the country has been buoyed by the discovery of substantial reserves of oil — and the building of an internationally financed pipeline capable of taking the oil out to a port in Cameroon. A unique agreement between overseas oil companies, the World Bank, and the Chadian government seeks to ensure that oil revenues are used for schools, roads, water, and other much needed development priorities. Non-governmental organizations were involved in negotiating the agreement — and there is a great expectation that they will be extensively involved in follow-on development efforts.

APRODEPIT, an acronym for Action pour la Promotion des Ressources des Organisations de Défense de l'Environnement et de la Pisciculture intégrée au Tchad (Action for the Promotion of Resources for Organizations Defending the Environment and Integrated Pisciculture in Chad) has been recognized as a national non-governmental organization since 1992. Governmental officials point to it as a model partner in the effort to promote sustainable development.

Using local knowledge

“The importance of using local knowledge as the starting point for initiating new technologies and constant contact in the field with the participating groups has given APRODEPIT an impressive success rate with its projects,” said Nénodji Madingar, assistant director of Forestry and Desertification in the Ministry of Environment and Water. “This is apparently an approach that should be promoted and used by other development agencies.”

APRODEPIT's story began in the mid-1980s, against a backdrop of decreasing water levels in rivers and lakes, harmful practices such as the use of dynamite to kill fish, the disappearance of various aquatic species, and the need for more protein in people's diets.

Inspired by his practice of the Bahá'í



Faith, which emphasizes service to humanity, Mr. Kosse Malla decided to establish a small fish breeding project in Bongor, where he was then living. Some years before, he had received specialized training in fish breeding, and in 1985 he and his wife began putting aside about 25 percent of their household budget to finance the project.

With the help of a single employee, he dug two ponds with about 600 square meters in total surface area and stocked them with about 3,000 tilapia, a fish with rapid growth and breeding characteristics.

The initial success of this effort — after about six months the weight of the fish had tripled — led to the formation of a small association that included Mr. Kosse Malla's family and 11 other families. The association was later incorporated as APRODEPIT.

Over time, APRODEPIT moved from Bongor to Sarh, and the initial group of 12 families gave control of it to a formalized structure that today includes a board of directors and several advisory committees.

APRODEPIT takes a distinctive approach to development that emphasizes the equality of women and men, environmental protection, systematic growth, and, above all else, close consultation with the local community — principles that are all drawn from the Bahá'í teachings.

“It's the Bahá'í teachings about working together in consultation and cooperation that bring the whole concept of APRODEPIT together,” said Allataroum Bongo, the organization's director of personnel.

In Waltama, villagers say that spirit of consultation and consultation promoted by APRODEPIT has been one of the keys to

Yam-bel-yam Kosse Malla, the founder and director of APRODEPIT. “Our underlying idea is to promote an organic process of community development.”





In the village of Waltama, the men's group has organized a village granary, which enables villagers to store grain until the market price is highest.

their success. The creation of a village granary exemplifies that spirit, said Michel Miramadjingaye, who is president of the Waltama group.

"In the past, everybody stored grain at their own house," said Mr. Miramadjingaye. "But, often, when people kept the grain themselves, they turned it into alcohol or sold it to meet almost any personal need.

"But now everybody brings the harvest to the group and they stock it together. After they have stocked the grain, all members decide on a calendar of sales, on how long they will hold the grain before selling it. This way, they can't easily take it out and waste it. Rather, they watch prices and sell only when it is profitable," said Mr. Miramadjingaye.

Although the idea of a granary was the group's own, APRODEPIT provided training in accounting and other management practices that made it a viable enterprise. "So now, more people are planning ahead and aware of how to manage their homes," said Mr. Miramadjingaye.

Hippos and fishing

It is the creation of protected fishing zones that, without doubt, has had the greatest impact in the areas where APRODEPIT is working.

As noted by Mr. Mahamat, the net-seller, local community groups in Waltama and neighboring villages have declared portions of the Chari River protected, enforcing government rules that ban small mesh nets and restricting their own fishing activities in an

effort to bring back local fish populations.

Those groups, which have formed a union, have also established a protected zone for hippopotamuses — an idea that also emerged from a process of community consultation.

The villagers noticed that there were more fish where there were also hippos — and so, with the assistance of field managers from APRODEPIT, they set up signs declaring their section of the river a wildlife protection zone. They also formed surveillance patrols to drive away poachers.

As a result, since 1995 the population of hippos has gone from approximately two to about 200, said David Ngakele, APRODEPIT's zone coordinator for the area.

The increased presence of hippos, in turn, has improved the fishing. The manure from the hippopotamuses serves to breed small insects, which become food for the fish. Additionally, said APRODEPIT staff, the hippos act as natural fish wardens. Outsiders are afraid to mingle with them, while local fishermen have learned how to maneuver through the herd without upsetting them.

Fisherman in Waltama and other communities say fish populations have returned to nearly half of what they once were. "Before we couldn't even find one fish in this part of the river," said Bernard Noubaram, a 27-year-old Waltama fisherman.

Other communities east and west along the Chari have heard of the successes in and around Waltama, and they have begun approaching APRODEPIT for similar assistance.

In the village of Kodjoguila, for example, about 30 kilometers northeast of Sarh, a newly formed group has, on APRODEPIT's advice, restricted fishing in one of the seasonal ponds in the Chari riverbed. Since the group was formed in June 2003, the villagers have been throwing leftover millet hulls and brewing residue into the pond to "feed" the fish.

"In our grandparents' time, one fisherman could fill four canoes with fish in one day," said Dangabo Ngamaye, a former fisherman and now a teacher in Kodjoguila. "Then we were invaded by fishermen with nets and we started to notice the disappearance of different species of fish."

In March 2004, amid much ceremony, villagers gathered along the pond's shore as fishermen strung out a net for the first time since June. They wanted to see if the method worked — and the results were quite satisfactory. The men netted a wide variety of

species, and many relatively large fish.

Mr. Ngamaye added that in the past, they also had plentiful wildlife, such as deer and gazelle. “By starting with the fish, we hope the population will get a clear example of how we can bring back some things that have been lost. And when they see that is working, we hope to re-establish the forest, and when the forest is protected, we hope the animals will come back,” he said.

When villages like Kodjoguila ask for APRODEPIT’s assistance, the NGO’s first step is to ask for a general assembly of the village’s population. They explain the kinds of training they can offer and they urge the formation of at least one or two “activity groups.” Usually, in fact, two groups are formed: one for the men and one for women.

The groups are then encouraged to discuss the kinds of problems they face and, in a consultative process with APRODEPIT field workers, to consider possible solutions. This consultative process stands at the heart of APRODEPIT’s methodology.

“It makes a great deal of difference to the outcome of a project when local knowledge is considered as valuable input, not something to be ignored — or worse, eradicated,” noted Ms. Madingar of the Ministry of Environment and Water. “The beneficiaries immediately think of themselves as partners in a plan of action rather than observers. This seems to be the basic approach of APRODEPIT, and it should be made accessible to a much larger audience.”

Jean-Pierre Réville, the director of Aquaculture Service Consultants, an international consulting group based in Canada that has recently studied APRODEPIT, said it was APRODEPIT’s “patience, innovation, explanations, and the implication of all of the principle actors, as well as an understanding of the local environment,” that contributed to the creation of “a very positive group dynamic” in the areas it serves.

One of the primary concerns in the region has been the decline of fish. But disappearing forest lands, wildlife, the lack of education, and the illiteracy of women have also emerged as major concerns.

As of March 2003, APRODEPIT was working with 143 groups in the Sarh region. Ninety-eight were men’s groups; 45 were women’s groups. Among the men’s groups, some 60 were engaged in some sort of fishing-related activity, about 28 were experimenting with organic agriculture, and 11

were growing fruit trees. Among the women’s groups, curing, smoking and marketing fish is the primary activity, with about 30 groups involved in such activities. Other groups are exploring small-scale commercial activities.

APRODEPIT also operates in the central region of Chad, near N’Djamena, where it has a branch office. It currently works with about 49 groups in the Léré region, with some nine groups in villages in the Chari-Baguirmi area and another nine groups in the Batha region.

Many of those are now moving up the ladder of development — from fishing to schools to health — following the “organic process” outlined by Mr. Kosse Malla. In Waltama, for example, the women’s group has gone on from fish-preserving and selling to the establishment of literacy classes for its members.

“We started the classes so the mothers can help their children with their homework,” said Ruth Nevino, 40, who is president of the Waltama women’s group, explaining that the women each pay about \$1 a month from the money they make from fish sales to help pay a literacy teacher, whose salary is also partly funded by APRODEPIT.

“If we get a big fund, the idea is to create a village pharmacy, so that we have some medicine in the village,” added Ms. Nevino.

In Waltama, even Mr. Mahamat, the net merchant, has come around to the ideas promoted by APRODEPIT. He now makes his home in the village, marketing his wares up and down the river in the protected zone.

“Now, by my own volition,” he said, “I don’t sell small nets anymore.”*

“It makes a great deal of difference to the outcome of a project when local knowledge is considered as valuable input, not something to be ignored — or worse, eradicated.”

**– Nénodji Madingar,
Assistant Director
of Forestry and
Desertification**

In the village of Gnala, women stand in front of a fish smoker that was built with the help of APRODEPIT.



Role of religion in conflict-torn areas explored at NGO experts meeting

In a camp in Eritrea, UN officials asked refugees what they most wanted. "Two or three elders stood up and said, 'The most urgent and important thing for us is we want a mosque.' Because they had nowhere to pray."

– Olara Otunna

Below: Olara Otunna, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, at "Societies in Transition: The Significance of the International Criminal Court in Peace and Reconciliation."

UNITED NATIONS — The positive role of faith and religion in healing conflict-torn populations emerged as an important theme here at a recent experts meeting held by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The meeting, "Societies in Transition: The Significance of the International Criminal Court in Peace and Reconciliation," was sponsored by the Faith and Ethics Caucus of the NGO Coalition for the International Criminal Court (ICC). It was held at the UN Church Center 11-12 March 2004 and featured talks by prominent NGO leaders, ICC representatives, and UN officials.

Olara Otunna, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, one of two keynote speakers, stressed the importance of the International Criminal Court as a mechanism for accountability, truth-seeking, and healing in cases of extreme conflict — especially those involving children.

He also said that religious groups have a key role to play in healing and reconciliation. He said, for example, that religious leaders and women's groups were among the first actors to denounce rebel atrocities in Sierra Leone.

Further, Mr. Otunna said, faith and religion were often the last resort of innocent people in the face of extreme conflict.

Mr. Otunna described the state of people in the midst of crises in the Congo, Uganda, the Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cambodia. "You live in a harrowing hell, where the earth has opened up beneath you and...you are disappearing in the ground," he said. "Nobody out there can rescue you from this situation."

In such cases, Mr. Otunna said, the people have had nowhere to turn but to God. And when stability returns, he said, he found that one of the first things such populations desire is a place to pray and worship.

In a camp in Eritrea, he said, he and other UN officials asked refugees what they most wanted. "Two or three elders stood up and said, 'The most urgent and important thing for us is we want a mosque.'"

"They had no food; they had no hospital," Mr. Otunna said. "All the usual things that we would think of, they didn't have. But their number one request, and with a sense of urgency, was a mosque — and a church for the minority Christian groups. Because they had nowhere to pray.

"You should have then seen the panic in the faces of half of the UN bureaucrats," he added, to some laughter.

Other speakers stressed the practical role that faith groups can play in helping conflict-torn societies rebuild and reconcile after a ceasefire or peace settlement.

Wanda Hall, outreach adviser of the ICC Office of the Prosecutor, highlighted the necessity of building sustainable relationships between the Prosecutor's office and local communities. Faith groups, along with other sectors of civil society, can provide expert knowledge regarding the social norms of the communities in which investigations take place, allowing bridges of trust to be built between the ICC and the local population, she said. Such trust and understanding is critical for the Court's success in affected communities.

One critical issue facing the Court is the



tension between the demands for justice and peace by war-torn societies. In many cases, the fear of prosecution prompts warlords to continue fighting, while blanket amnesty programs offer no justice to victims.

Isaac Flattau, associate legal officer in the ICC Victims Participation and Reparations Unit, said faith groups can provide support to the ICC's restorative justice function.

Faith groups that operate within a country where proceedings take place may partner with the ICC to provide support and assistance to victims as they face traumatic investigation and trial proceedings, said Mr. Flattau. Faith groups outside the conflict area can support victims by mobilizing members to contribute to the historically unprecedented Victims Trust Fund, which has been created to provide reparations

and rehabilitation to victims and affected communities, he said.

Commenting on the success of the meeting, Faith and Ethics Caucus Co-chair Jeffery Huffines said the meeting was important for its examination of the whole range of moral and ethical issues facing the ICC as it seeks to balance issues of retributive and restorative justice with reconciliation.

"We see justice and reconciliation not as exclusive goals, but rather two sides of the same coin," said Mr. Huffines, who is the representative to the United Nations of the Bahá'í community of the United States. "One of the main purposes of the Caucus is to bring together religious groups so that people of faith can work with the Court to assist in healing these traumatized societies."*

EXHIBITION

Social harmony display at European Parliament

STRASBOURG, France — An exhibition on social harmony produced by the Bahá'í International Community graced the first floor gallery of the Winston Churchill Building at the European Parliament 10-12 February 2004.

Titled "The Bahá'í International Community: Promoting Unity in Diversity throughout Europe for over a Century," the 17-panel display told the story, through words and photographs, of how the Bahá'í communities of Europe have sought to promote peace, cross-cultural integration, religious tolerance, and business ethics through a variety of concrete projects and actions.

More than 150 people — including some 30 members of the Parliament — attended a reception on 10 February. The reception featured an address by Baroness Sarah Ludford, a member of the European Parliament from the United Kingdom who sponsored the exhibition.

"I believe this little-known religion of global reach is of interest to people like ourselves who work in an international context in this expanding and enlarging European Parliament," said Baroness Ludford, who is not a Bahá'í.

She said that Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, "warned of the dangers of unconstrained nationalism and called for a system of global governance, which has led Bahá'ís to be particular supporters of the United Nations."

The exhibition was created by the Bahá'í International Community to welcome the 10 new states that will join the European Union on 1 May 2004.

Also addressing the reception was Dr. Laszlo Farkas, a representative of the national governing council of the Bahá'ís of Hungary, which is one of the 10 new countries joining the EU.

"For us, the unification of different cultures and peoples is a natural process," said Dr. Farkas. "Bahá'ís both in Europe and in the whole world are working for this unified human family."*

Baroness Sarah Ludford, center, with Ronald Mayer, the ambassador of Luxembourg to the European Parliament, left, and Ulrich Bohner, chief executive of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, right, at a reception on 10 February 2004 inaugurating an exhibition on social harmony.



Latest volume discusses religious tolerance, new approaches to HIV/AIDS

HAIFA, Israel — The need for religious tolerance, the role of the individual in building society, and HIV/AIDS are among the topics addressed in the newly released volume of *The Bahá'í World*.

The Bahá'í World 2002-2003 is the 11th volume in an annual series aimed both at Bahá'í readers and the general public. Its pages describe the aims and activities of local and national Bahá'í communities around the world.

“If people want to understand the forces that cause the Bahá'í community to act and the results of those actions, then this volume is the place to look,” said Ann Boyles, the book's senior editor.

“The articles in the book provide striking evidence of the Bahá'í community's involvement in issues of serious and global importance,” said Dr. Boyles.

For example, said Dr. Boyles, the volume reprints the full text of the recent message of the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders. That message called for decisive action to eradicate religious intolerance and fanaticism, warning that with “every day that passes, danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable.”

The full text of the message of the Universal House of Justice is published in the volume, as is a report of the distribution of the message to religious leaders by Bahá'í communities around the world.

Other major articles include “Facing the Growing HIV/AIDS Epidemic: A Bahá'í Perspective,” by Dawn Smith, “Obligation and Responsibility in Constructing a World Civilization,” by Hoda Mahmoudi, and a “World Watch” essay by Dr. Boyles on the role of the individual in building society.

Dr. Smith's article says Bahá'ís have taken a different tack in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Not only have Bahá'ís begun to apply the distinctive spiritual principles of their Faith on an individual level, they have also launched a number of small

scale educational projects to address the epidemic's root causes, she writes.

The overarching approach is one of unity, she says. “Too often members and representatives of the world's religions have used the HIV/AIDS epidemic to promote discord, insisting that it is solely a problem of the irreligious or that this illness is a punishment from God, meted out to ‘sinners’ or the ‘unfaithful,’” she writes.

“‘Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized the role of religion in promoting unity and in working in harmony with science,” she writes.

“HIV-related stigma and discrimination are not only unjust and unkind at the individual level, they are themselves a contributor to new infections.”

Dr. Mahmoudi's article examines the nature of a spiritualized society founded on altruism and reciprocity, based on the principles in the Bahá'í sacred writings.

“The Bahá'í teachings recognize that the transformation of individuals into altruistic persons cannot take place outside the social context, which must provide a matrix for that transformation,” she writes.

Other reports featured in the book include an account of the Bahá'í participation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the annual “Year in Review” survey, and an update on the situation of the Bahá'í communities in Iran and Egypt.

Also printed in the book are a selection of major statements by the Bahá'í International Community and a statement on social cohesion by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.

This 320-page book is prepared by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information. It contains numerous color photographs, and is available for US\$18.00. It can be ordered from World Centre Publications through the United States Bahá'í Distribution Service, 4703 Fulton Industrial Boulevard Atlanta, GA 30336-2017, USA. www.bahai bookstore.com e-mail: bds@usbnc.org *

– Bahá'í World News Service

Review: Nationalism Re-imagined

Review, continued from page 16

principle of nationality has made it a far greater force for disintegration than for integration.”

Dr. Carnegie, a professor at the prestigious Bates College in the United States, examines the nation-state through the lens of anthropology — and his initial focus is on marginalized peoples of the Caribbean, such as albinos and runaway slaves.

In one chapter, for example, he discusses in some detail the lives of “speculators” — the Caribbean term for a class of itinerant traders who play a key, if under-acknowledged, role in ensuring the steady flow of goods and services between the far-flung islands of that region.

The important point about speculators is that they are “transterritorial,” writes Dr. Carnegie. “They move freely between city and countryside; their work takes them routinely from one village to the next; they travel back and forth between different nation-states; they advance the interests of capital as well as those of the peasant sector...”

As such, he writes, “speculators and others who work feverishly on the margins violate the precepts of the nation-state.”

And so, in the same way that the existence of albinism calls into question the nature of race, speculators and others on the margins call into question the nature of the nation-state, Dr. Carnegie writes. “With hindsight, we now see that carving up the world into independent countries without simultaneously addressing inequities in the global system has merely legitimized the confinement of peoples to particular places.”

Unlike scholars who are content to analyze without offering answers, Dr. Carnegie suggests there is a new and cohesive vision of community that can replace nationalism as a framework for integration. “The need for an embracing vision of humanity’s oneness that can fulfill the ideals, reward the trust, and engage the capacities of the mass of the world’s peoples is evident,” writes Dr. Carnegie, “but it has become more conspicuous in the wake of the stunning events now known as 9/11.”

In a final chapter, titled “World Community Imagined,” Dr. Carnegie draws on his own belief in the Bahá’í Faith to outline a new paradigm for global integration.

“I believe that race and unbridled nationalism ought to be ‘relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines,’” he writes. “One possible answer to this dilemma may be found in the universal framework conceived by Bahá’u’lláh, which is being actualized in the Bahá’í world community that represents a microcosm of humanity: over 2,100 nationalities and tribes living in more than 120,000 localities in more than two hundred countries.”

Most significantly, the Bahá’í community manages to simultaneously value unity and diversity. “In contrast,” he writes, “most of humanity’s working models operate on a principle of diversity decoupled from unity. Conflict and competition are central ordering metaphors for much human interaction.”

The Bahá’í teachings also offer an alternative to the dominance of western consumerism and transnational capitalism.

“The Bahá’í community has long been involved in a gradual process of seeding, incubating, and nurturing worldwide an attachment to a richly textured practice of global community independent in origin but nevertheless in harmony with a wide variety of histories and cultural values — a global system less vulnerable than most to expediency or whim,” he writes.

The Bahá’í community has also developed a unique local to global axis, he writes. “The family and local community are especially valued and nurtured; yet these loyalties are also linked to wider cultural, national, and planetary ones and grounded in a clear conception of the unity of humankind.”

He concludes by urging scholars to examine the Bahá’í community for themselves as they search for new ways to understand issues related to nationalism, globalization, race and religion.

“[T]he movement’s potential has as yet barely been detected and is little understood,” he writes. “In part, this is because it bubbles up simultaneously from every obscure corner of the planet.”

In a world where the nation-state is under assault from a wide range of trends — from terrorism to global environmental degradation to the rise of multinational corporations — Dr. Carnegie’s book stands as a refreshing and positive analysis. His methodology and critique are thoughtful and original — and his suggestion that answers to such problems might lie in religion — and especially in a new and sometimes overlooked religion — is both brave and breathtaking.*

“Race and unbridled nationalism ought to be ‘relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines.’ One possible answer to this dilemma may be found in the universal framework conceived by Bahá’u’lláh, which is being actualized in the Bahá’í world community that represents a microcosm of humanity.”

– Charles V. Carnegie

Nationalism as a figment of our imagination

**Postnationalism
Prefigured:
Caribbean
Borderlands**

**By Charles V.
Carnegie**

**Rutgers University
Press**

**New Brunswick,
NJ, and London**

In the opening chapter of his new book, Charles V. Carnegie describes in vivid detail a morning swim on a beach in his native Jamaica — the warm water, the cloudless sky, and string of bright buoys.

But what made the morning so memorable was not the delightful exercise; it was the disturbing comments he overheard from beach attendants after the swim.

They were arguing about his paternity, discussing whether his parents were black or white, and then speculating about a range of potential deficiencies he might possess. As an albino growing up in the Caribbean, it was a discussion he was not unfamiliar with. In colloquial Jamaican, an albino of African ancestry is called a “dundus” — and is the object of stereotype.

“What the dundus lacks is visible blackness in any of its permissible shadings,” writes Dr. Carnegie in *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands*. “He is seen as lacking, reflecting poorly on, or letting down the race.”

As an introduction to a book about the “borderlands” where nationalism, race, and globalization intersect and often disastrously collide, the story may seem out of place. But the interjection of personal narrative — along with an examination of other individuals, groups and even nations that exist just beyond or between traditional boundaries and territories — is what makes this new scholarly volume so penetrating.

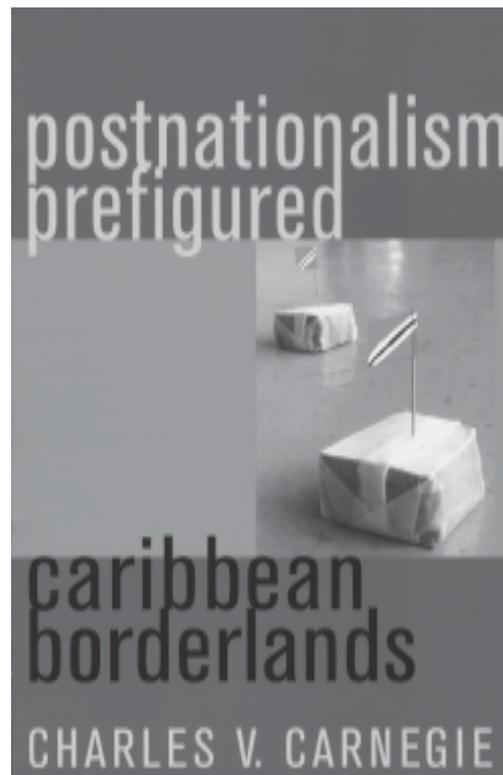
“The Jamaican dundus and albinism more broadly are symbolic forms embedded in a wider social discourse whose geographical and temporal boundaries shift from Jamaica, to the wider Caribbean, to the United States and from the late eighteenth century to the present,” writes Dr. Carnegie. “The marginalized position of the dundus, and the taboos surrounding him, offer a site from which to question the inclusiveness that collectivities of race and nation claim.”

Drawing extensively on both his own experiences as an anthropologist and a wide-ranging study of current literature in the field, Dr. Carnegie examines the entire concept of the nation-state as well as the impor-

ance of race and even religion in the state’s structure and integrity.

He concludes that nationalism is an “imagined” thing, built not on human or geographic reality but on a flawed ideology that has gradually taken hold in the world largely because of its power to organize industrial society. Yet the nation-state concept is built on inherent contradictions, Dr. Carnegie writes, such as its exclusionary nature.

“Nationalism both presumes and demands a fundamental sameness, whether through a common pledge of loyalty to a set of civic principles or through supposedly shared primordial characteristics such as language or ethnicity,” he writes. “This presumption of homogeneity sets up both external and internal oppositions.”



“Minority populations that are marked off, devalued, or otherwise displaced within existing states begin to see the formation of new nation-states as their only available recourse,” he continues. “[T]he primacy given to the prin-

Review, continued on page 15