

# ONE COUNTRY

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

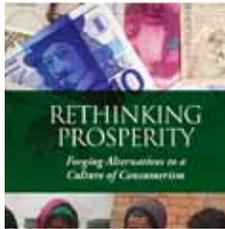
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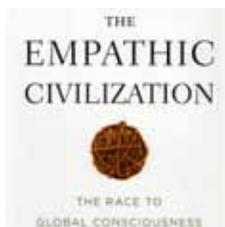
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## World religious leaders call for action on poverty, peace, and the environment

**W**INNIPEG, Canada — Religious leaders from around the world convened in June in this central Canadian prairie city to challenge global political leaders to take “inspired leadership and action” to halt poverty, protect the environment, and work harder to end violent conflict.

The World Religions Summit, held 23-24 June 2010, brought together more than 80 leaders from at least 20 countries, representing all the major independent world religions, including the Bahá'í Faith.

Convened in advance of the G8 and G20 meetings held a few days later in and around Toronto, the explicit goal of the Summit was to reflect the moral conscience of the world's peoples as embodied in global faith traditions.

“Acknowledging our common humanity and embracing the imperative to treat all persons with dignity, we affirm that no one person is more or less valuable than another,” said a Summit statement, issued after many hours of deliberations at the University of Winnipeg.

“We urge the political leaders to consider first the vulnerable among us, particularly our children, and to work together to address the dehumanizing scourge of poverty and injustice, and practice and promote care for our common environment, the Earth,” the statement said.

*Summit, continued on page 6*



**Susanne Tamas, center, a delegate from the Canadian Bahá'í community, at the World Religions Summit 2010. At left is Rabbi Adam Scheier of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and right, Commissioner William W. Francis, Territorial Commander for the Salvation Army for Canada and Bermuda. (Photograph by Louis Brunet)**

# Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism

## IN BRIEF

- **Cultural norms and values that promote consumerism at all cost need to be examined and revised**
- **These include conceptions of human nature, development, economic crisis, technological development, and education**
- **Each crisis — be it climate, energy, food, water, disease, financial collapse — has revealed new dimensions of consumerism’s burden**
- **What’s needed are new and broader visions of human purpose and prosperity**

**The narrowly materialistic worldview underpinning much of modern economic thinking has contributed to the degradation of human conduct, the disruption of families and communities, the corruption of public institutions, and the exploitation and marginalization of large segments of the population — women and girls in particular.**

*[Editor’s note: The following Perspective editorial is adapted from a statement of the Bahá’í International Community to the 18th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. The full statement is at: <http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/10-0503.htm> ]*

**A**gainst the backdrop of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, the transformation from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability is now widely understood as a necessary step.

To promote such a transformation, which implicitly challenges cultural norms and values that have promoted consumerism at all cost, a number of underlying conceptions will need to be examined and revised. These include conceptions of human nature, development, economic crisis, technological development, and education.

**Human nature:** The question of human nature has an important place in the discourse on sustainable consumption and production. It prompts us to reexamine, at the deepest levels, who we are and what our purpose is in life. The human experience is essentially spiritual in nature: it is rooted in the inner reality — or what some call the “soul.” The culture of consumerism, however, has tended to reduce human beings to competitive, insatiable consumers of goods and to objects of manipulation by the market. Commonly held views have assumed the existence of an intractable conflict between what people really want (i.e. to consume more) and what humanity needs (i.e. equitable access to resources).

The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order — moderation, justice, love, reason,

sacrifice, and service to the common good — have too often been dismissed as naive ideals. Yet, it is these and related qualities that must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence, which are often rewarded by the market and political forces driving current patterns of unsustainable consumption and production.

**Vision of development:** In a similar manner, the articulation of a vision of sustainability must emerge from a public discourse on the nature and purpose of human development. The transition to sustainable consumption and production must be seen as part of a global enterprise which enables all individuals to fulfill their dual purpose, namely to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the betterment of the wider community.

Ultimately, the transformation required to shift towards sustainable consumption and production will entail no less than an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body — as well as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it. Among these changes, many of which are already the focus of considerable public discourse, are: the consciousness of world citizenship; the eventual federation of all nations through an integrated system of governance with capacity for global decision-making; the establishment of structures which recognize humanity’s common ownership of the earth’s resources; the establishment of full equality between men and women; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; the establishment of a universal currency and other integrating mechanisms that promote global economic justice; the adoption of an

international auxiliary language to facilitate mutual understanding; and the redirection of massive military expenditures towards constructive social ends.

**Crisis in the current economic system:** The dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. In such a model, endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This preoccupation with the production and accumulation of material objects and comforts (as sources of meaning, happiness and social acceptance) has consolidated itself in the structures of power and information. The unfettered cultivation of needs and wants has led to a system fully dependent on excessive consumption for a privileged few, while reinforcing exclusion, poverty and inequality, for the majority. Each successive global crisis — be it climate, energy, food, water, disease, financial collapse — has revealed new dimensions of the exploitation and oppression inherent in the current patterns of consumption and production.

The narrowly materialistic worldview underpinning much of modern economic thinking has contributed to the degradation of human conduct, the disruption of families and communities, the corruption of public institutions, and the exploitation and marginalization of large segments of the population — women and girls in particular. The shift towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable society will require attention to a harmonious dynamic between the material and non-material (or moral) dimensions of consumption and production.

It is also important to emphasize the relationship between production and employment as a critical dimension of a strong economy. Sustainable production is not simply about 'greener' technology but rather, should involve systems that enable all human beings to contribute to the productive process. More than simply the means of generating wealth and meeting basic needs, work has a role in developing one's talents, refining one's character,

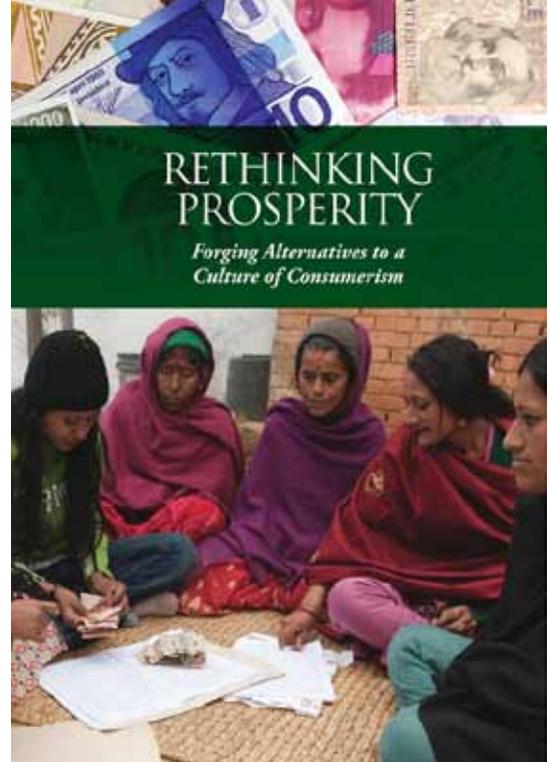
rendering service, and contributing to the advancement of society.

**Technological development:** The majority of technological development is driven by market forces that do not reflect the basic needs of the world's peoples. Furthermore, the emphasis on the transfer of technology without accompanying efforts to increase participation in the generation and application of knowledge can only serve to widen the gap between the rich and the poor — the 'developers' and the 'users' of technology. Developing the capacity for identifying technological need and for technological innovation and adaptation — in light of societal needs and environmental constraints — will be vital to social progress.

**Education:** Education must be based on a clear vision of the kind of society that we wish to live in; and the kind of individuals that will bring this about. It needs to help learners reflect on the purpose of life and help them to step out of their cultural realities to develop alternative visions and approaches to the problems at hand and to understand the manifold consequences of their behaviors and to adjust these accordingly.

Schools themselves must become participants in the social transformation processes. The curriculum cannot simply aim to impart relevant knowledge and skills; rather it should aim to develop the vast potential inherent in the human being.

**The Bahá'í community's approach to transformation:** For over a decade, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been endeavoring systematically to effect a transformation among individuals and communities around the world — to inspire and build the capacity for service. The framework for action guiding these activities has been rooted in a dynamic of learning — characterized by action, reflection, and consultation. In thousands of communities, Bahá'ís have set into motion neighborhood-level processes that seek to empower individuals of all ages to recognize and



develop their spiritual capacities and to channel their collective energies towards the betterment of their communities. They have started children's classes that focus on laying the foundations of a noble and upright character. For youth aged 11-14, they have created a learning environment which helps them to form their moral identity at this critical time in their life. People of all ages are invited to take part in small groups of participatory learning around core concepts and themes which encourage individuals to become agents of change in their communities within a dynamic of learning and an orientation towards service.

Around the world, new and broader visions of human purpose and prosperity are moving from the periphery to the center of public discourse. It is becoming clear that the pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.

# At the UN, a discussion on consumerism and its impact on the planet

## IN BRIEF

- During the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, panelists discussed “Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism”
- Saying the earth is approaching its limits, they called for reconsideration of the consumer culture that stresses the acquisition of ever more material goods
- The focus should be on true prosperity and well-being

**N**EW YORK — One of the critical questions about humanity’s long term future is this: Can the earth support the estimated nine billion people who are likely to be alive at mid-century if everyone adopts a consumer-oriented lifestyle like Europeans or North Americans?

Many say that the answer is no, and among them is Tim Jackson, a professor of sustainable development at the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom.

“We are already outside the safe operating space of the planet we live on,” said Prof. Jackson at a panel discussion on 10 May 2010 during this year’s UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

Held at the offices of the Bahá’í International Community, the topic was “Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism.”

Prof. Jackson said a number of researchers have already concluded that humanity has already exceeded the likely limits of the earth’s capacity in terms of climate change, biodiversity and the nitrogen cycle.

“Imagine a world of nine billion people by 2050, and that all aspire to an income level the same as, say, a Western European income, with 2 percent annual growth,” said Prof. Jackson. “That just carries within it the seeds of its own destruction.”

**“We are encouraged to spend money we don’t have on things we don’t need to create impressions that don’t last on people we don’t care about.”**

- Prof. Tim Jackson

A member of the United Kingdom’s Sustainable Development Commission, Prof. Jackson said

**Panelists at a side event during the Commission on Sustainable Development** included, left to right, Duncan Hanks of the Bahá’í International Community, Tim Jackson of the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom, Jeff Barber of the Integrative Strategies Forum in the US, Luis Flores Mimica of Consumers International in Chile, and Victoria Thoresen of the Norwegian Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living.



Western consumerism uses too much energy and produces too much carbon dioxide per unit of economic growth.

What is needed, said Prof. Jackson and other panelists, is a reconsideration of the consumer culture that so relentlessly urges people to adopt a lifestyle based on the acquisition of new and more material goods.

“We are encouraged to spend money we don’t have on things we don’t need to create impressions that don’t last on people we don’t care about,” was how Prof. Jackson characterized the current culture of consumption.

“We need a better concept of prosperity, a shared prosperity, a lasting prosperity, a prosperity built around the concept of people’s capacity to flourish, within the confines of a finite planet,” said Prof. Jackson.

Other panelists voiced similar sentiments.

### “Empty aspirations”

Luis Flores Mimica, a representative of Consumers International who is based in Chile, said that there are many people in the developing world who have not yet adopted the consumer-based lifestyle, which he said was largely filled with “empty aspirations.”

**“We need to help make governments in the developing world realize that there is no way they can continue to follow the path of ‘development’ as labeled that way in the 1950s.”**

- Luis Flores Mimica

“We need to help make governments in the developing world realize that there is no way they can continue to follow the path of ‘development’ as labeled that way in the 1950s,” said Mr. Mimica.

Victoria Thoresen of the Norwegian Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living said one way to help humanity make the shift to a new system of sustainable values is to recognize our essential oneness — and to consider that we are now collectively like an adolescent moving towards maturity.



**Tim Jackson, a professor of sustainable development at the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom, during a video interview in advance of a panel discussion on alternatives to consumerism.**

“Constructive change depends upon individuals being able to recognize spiritual principles and to identify patterns and processes of development in society,” said Ms. Thoresen, who is a Bahá’í.

Jeff Barber, executive director of Integrative Strategies Forum in the United States, said one place to start “redefining progress” is by considering the vast research about what really makes people happy. Much of that shows that material consumption does not necessarily lead to well-being.

The discussion was co-sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations.

The issue of sustainable consumption and production patterns was one of several topics addressed at this year’s Commission on Sustainable Development, held 3-14 May 2010. Other topics addressed were transport, chemicals, waste management, and mining.

In his final report this year, the Commission Chair Luis Alberto Ferraté said that the next ten years are critical for sustainable development. He — like other governmental representatives to the Commission — stressed the importance of

international cooperation and better integration between the set of issue areas that encompass sustainable development.

“The recent series of crises have highlighted shared vulnerabilities and created a new sense of urgency,” said Mr. Ferraté, who is Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources in Guatemala. “They have underscored the need for greater international cooperation simultaneously to accelerate the pursuit of poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals, maintain and enhance the development momentum, and halt and reverse the mounting pressure on the Earth’s ecosystems.”

Mr. Ferraté added that this year’s themes “go to the very heart of the sustainable development challenge. They affect almost the entire range of human needs and ecological imperatives, including food security, health, gender equity, labour rights, the rights of indigenous people and local communities, biodiversity, climate change, ecological footprint, physical mobility, environmental liabilities, agricultural as well as industrial productivity, social equity, and economic growth.”

# World religious leaders call for action on poverty, peace, and the environment

## IN BRIEF

- **Some 80 world religious leaders gathered at the World Religions Summit, inviting G8 and G20 leaders to “inspired leadership and action”**
- **Specifically, they asked global political leaders to do more to halt poverty, protect the environment, and end violent conflict**
- **Among the ideas that emerged was that religious groups and organizations must take a greater role in the public sphere if they are to fully address social issues at the political level — while also redoubling their own efforts at the grassroots level**

### *Summit, continued from page one*

The Summit was the sixth in a series of interfaith gatherings associated with the annual G8 meetings. The Reverend Dr. James Christie, secretary general of the Summit, said the meeting and its output were directed principally at the leaders of the so-called “Group of 8” countries because they represent the nations that have the most power to effect change in the world.

“The reality is that these nations have the money, they have the clout, and they make a difference,” said Dr. Christie.

As an interfaith gathering, the Summit was also notable for the deliberative process that went into drafting the statement. Although an advance draft had been prepared, delegates spent a considerable amount of time at the Summit consulting about revisions.

### Need for grassroots action

Among the ideas that emerged was that religious groups and organizations must take a greater role in the public sphere if they are to fully address social issues at the political level — and to increase their own efforts at the grassroots level.

In the deliberations, Jim Cornelius of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank told other participants that politicians have told him that while they agree with the goals of things like spending more to fight poverty, they can’t act without political support.

The politicians say, frankly, that “if I do what you tell me to do, I am not going to be in office for very long,” said Cornelius, whose organization represents 32 Christian denominations.

He and others concluded it was important for the religions themselves to work harder to motivate their own

followers to “create a political space” for politicians to act on social issues.

Others said it was also important for the religious communities themselves to redouble their own efforts to address poverty, the environment, and conflict resolution, to set an example.

“We are living in a very critical period in history,” said His Holiness, Aram I, of the Armenian Orthodox Church. “We religions, I believe what is important for us is building community. It is not just living side by side, coexisting peacefully. It is a question of building integrated communities, communities of integrated diversity, accepting and respecting the others, but living together.”

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- His Holiness, Aram I,  
Armenian Orthodox Church

“This is a basic value in all religions, and we have to tell the G8 and the world that we religions not only speak together but that we are working together to build communities of integrated dialogue,” said His Holiness Aram I.

### Bahá’í participation

Among the Bahá’í representatives at the Summit was Susanne Tamas of Canada, who was joined by Bahá’ís

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## Freedom of belief discussed in prelude to World Religions Summit

**W**INNIPEG, Canada — Religion remains a powerful force in world affairs, and freedom of religion must be upheld to ensure that its influence is progressive and positive.

That was among the main themes at a seminar on religious freedom held 22 June 2010. Sponsored by the Bahá'í community of Canada, the seminar was held as a prelude to the World Religions Summit. [See main story at left]

The day-long seminar featured four international experts in human rights from four different faith backgrounds.

The discussion was wide ranging, but the panelists converged on the idea that the right to investigate and embrace the truth inherent in religion and spirituality is taking on a new importance in world affairs.

“In spite of articles that have been written about the death of God, religion remains a vital force in defining the landscape of modern society — and a potent force for peace and well-being,” said Gerald Gall, a professor of law at the University of Alberta.

“That being the case, there is concurrently a notion that society must protect religious freedom from any assault on its integrity as a matter of human rights,” said Prof. Gall, who is Jewish.

Janet Epp Buckingham, a Christian and director of the Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa, said that religion encourages moral behavior, self sacrifice, and service to others. “Religion is vital to individuals, community and society in general,” she said.

Despite its potential for positive influence, Dr. Buckingham acknowledged, religion is often seen as divisive. But she and the other panelists said that the violence and hatred perpetrated in the name of religion are more often the result of clashes over power, natural resources, or economic or ethnic differences.

She noted reports of increasing conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. “This is odd because they have lived peacefully side by side for years,” said Dr. Buckingham. “But the Christians are ethnically different. They were often from a Chinese background. And they were well off and getting better off.

“So what was portrayed in the media as being a religious clash has much to do with economics and ethnicity. So you have to take this into account before you say, ‘Oh, religion is such a source of conflict,’” she said.

The former environment minister of Iraq, Mishkat Al Moumin, who is currently director of the Washington-based Women and Environment Organization, reported how supposedly warring Shiite and Sunni groups worked together in

Baghdad’s Sadr City to help improve environmental conditions there several years ago.

At the time, there was a shortage of water in Sadr City, and limited sewerage. And to meet those basic needs, even though they often fought against each other on other issues, “both Sunnis and Shiites said they were willing to make it happen. Because they both needed the same thing.”

Dr. Al Moumin, a Muslim, said she believes it is often environmental problems — such as a basic lack of a water or hygiene — that drive people to violence, not necessarily religious belief.

Payam Akhavan, a professor of international law at McGill University in Montreal, said that too often those who blame religion for violence in the world fail to see how, in fact, the materialistic ideologies that captured the imagination of millions in the last century were responsible for far more deaths than any religious war.

“What we have done in the modern era is to perfect mass murder and bring it to new and unprecedented heights,” said Prof. Akhavan, who previously served as first Legal Advisor to the Prosecutor’s Office of the International Criminal Tribunals for Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The holocaust, perpetrated by Nazism, and the purges in the Soviet Union, he said, showed the failure of “the promise of modernity.” People thought that the “use of the rational faculty could ensure progress and freedom.” Instead, he said, we got “state-sponsored, industrial scale, rational mass murder.”

Today, said Prof. Akhavan, the disenchantment with religion has led chiefly to the consumer-driven global capitalism that is “robbing us of our dignity as human beings by reducing us to a bundle of appetites.”

In reaction, he said, the world has witnessed a surge in religious fundamentalism that sees Western materialism as moral decay and degeneration. “The challenge is to find a path between these two models,” said Prof. Akhavan, who is a Bahá'í.

Prof. Akhavan said he believes such a path can be found by upholding genuine religious freedom, which entails a search for the truth and the freedom to explore that truth.

“The need is to create a transcendent spirituality, which can give us not merely an opportunity to tolerate each other, but to build a community of belief that transcends our apparent differences,” said Prof. Akhavan.

**A day-long seminar on religious freedom** held 21 June in Winnipeg, sponsored by the Bahá'í community of Canada, featured, left to right, Dr. Mishkat al Moumin, Professor Payam Akhavan, Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham, and Professor Gerald Gall.





**Delegates to the 2010 World Religions Summit** came from more than 20 countries. Left to right are the Rev. Dr. Karen A. Hamilton, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, and H.H. Swami Paramatmananda Saraswati and Swami Avdheshanand Giri, both of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha. *(Photograph by Louis Brunet)*

from five other countries — France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

“We believe that spiritual principles need to be brought into the discussion of such challenges as poverty, the environment, and peace and security,” said Ms. Tamas. “We want to create a space where the political leaders can reflect and make decisions for the long term, and for the common good, rather than on short-term, national concerns.”

“We’re also here to learn — because these issues are complex and we need to learn what other faiths are saying about them,” she said.

As a prelude to the Summit, the Bahá’í community of Canada sponsored a seminar on human rights and religious freedom. The day-long event — held in Winnipeg on Monday, 21 June — brought together four human rights experts from different religious backgrounds. [See page 7]

### **“Courageous and concrete” actions**

The Summit’s final statement asked global political leaders to take “courageous and concrete” actions to combat poverty, heal the environment, and make peace.

The section on poverty noted that more than a billion of the world’s people are “chronically hungry” and

that women, children, and indigenous peoples are among those most affected by poverty.

“The magnitude of poverty would be overwhelming were it not for the knowledge that this global inequity can be transformed into a shared life of human flourishing for all. Together, we have the capacity and the global resources to end extreme poverty and its impacts,” the statement said, urging countries to meet Millennium Development Goals.

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### **“We condemn religiously motivated terrorism and extremism and commit to stop the teaching and justification of the use of violence between and among our faith communities.”**

“All countries must do their part: educate girl children to high school level as one of the most effective development interventions; practice good governance; combat corruption, and put in place poverty reduction policies that ensure everyone has access to basic rights such as nutritious food, safe water, health care, education and economic opportunity,” said the statement.

The statement noted that all faith traditions “call us to careful stewardship of the Earth.” It warned that “bold

action is needed now” to stop climate change. “We must move beyond short-term political interests and arguments over who pays,” said the statement.

### **Peace and justice linked**

On peace, the statement said “well-being and shared security” can “only be realized when grounded in justice.” It called on governments to halt the nuclear arms race, and to make new investments to create a “culture of peace.”

The statement also noted that religion itself has been used to justify violent acts — and the leaders here vowed to work against religious violence.

“We condemn religiously motivated terrorism and extremism and commit to stop the teaching and justification of the use of violence between and among our faith communities,” the statement said.

## Two new members of the Universal House of Justice are chosen in a by-election

**H**AIFA, Israel — The worldwide Bahá'í community has elected two new members of the Universal House of Justice, its international governing body, replacing two departing members.

Stephen Birkland and Stephen Hall were chosen in a by-election held earlier this year. Their election was announced on 21 March 2010, the result of ballots sent in by members of all national Bahá'í governing bodies around the world, who serve as electors for the House of Justice.

The by-election fills two vacancies created when Hooper Dunbar and Peter Khan relinquished their positions before the end of their five-year terms, owing to their advanced age and the burden of work involved in membership. The last regular election of the nine members took place in 2008.

Mr. Birkland, 58, was serving as a member of the International Teaching Center at the time of his election. The Teaching Center, based in Haifa, is an appointed body that serves to advise the Universal House of Justice, among other duties.

Prior to his appointment to the Teaching Center in 2008, Mr. Birkland lived in Minnesota, USA, and worked as a psychotherapist and organizational consultant. He also taught at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN, in its college of management for some 20 years. He also served in several voluntary Bahá'í positions, including as a Continental Counsellor, from 1993 to 2008.

Mr. Birkland possesses a Bachelor of Science from the University of Minnesota and a Master of Science in counseling from the University of Wisconsin at River Falls.

Mr. Birkland and his wife, Nadjla, have two grown sons.

Mr. Hall, 56, was born in Australia. He also served as a member of the International Teaching Center, a position he had held since 2005. Before that, Mr. Hall served as a Continental Counsellor for two years. Prior to that, he served as national secretary of the Australian Bahá'í community, from 1996 to 2003.

Possessing both a Bachelor of Education and a Masters of Curriculum Development, Mr. Hall's background and training are in education. Before his full time employment with the Australian Bahá'í community, Mr. Hall taught in small rural schools in New South Wales. He also worked as a curriculum consultant with the NSW Department of Education from 1986-87, working with rural and indigenous (Aboriginal) communities. Between 1988 and 1994, he was the principal of several larger schools, also in NSW.

Mr. Hall and his wife, Dicy, have four grown children.

Mr. Dunbar, 72, had served in Haifa since 1973, when he was appointed as a member of the International Teaching Centre. He was first elected to the Universal House of Justice in 1988.

Originally from Los Angeles, Mr. Dunbar's early career was as an actor on stage, screen and television, making films with Columbia, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and Twentieth Century-Fox. In 1958 he began 15 years of residence in Latin America, where he worked as a translator and educator. Mr. Dunbar served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Nicaragua, and in 1968 he was appointed to the Continental Board of Counselors in South America.

Mr. Dunbar is an accomplished painter whose works have been shown in Europe and elsewhere. He is also

an author, most recently of *Forces of Our Time: The Dynamics of Light and Darkness*, published last year. Mr. Dunbar and his wife, Maralynn, have one son.

Dr. Khan, 73, was first elected to the Universal House of Justice in 1987 and has served as a member since.

Born in Australia, he earned a doctorate in electrical engineering from the University of Sydney and then went to the University of Michigan as a Fulbright postdoctoral fellow before becoming a member of the faculty there. He returned to Australia in 1975 to professorial positions, first at the University of New South Wales and then at the University of Queensland.

Dr. Khan has published widely in his profession and from 1978 to 2000 was a member of the editorial board of the journal "IEEE Transactions on Microwave Theory." He is a fellow of the Institution of Engineers Australia and a senior member of the Institution of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

His Bahá'í service included membership on the Auxiliary Board, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, and the Continental Board of Counselors for Australasia before his appointment in 1983 as a member of the International Teaching Centre.

With his wife, Dr. Janet Khan, he is the author of *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*.

## In Brazil, innovative seminars help combat domestic violence

### IN BRIEF

- **Since 2001, the National Forum on Human Rights Education has taken a leading role in fighting domestic violence**
- **It has produced a series of seminars for law enforcement officials and social workers**
- **The seminars are distinctive for their participatory methods and an emphasis on human rights and the equality of women**

**B**RASILIA, Brazil — Without doubt, domestic violence is a global problem, affecting women in every country. According to the World Health Organization, as many as one in four women in the world have suffered violence at the hands of an intimate partner.

Brazil is no exception. A recent government-sponsored study found that 10 women are killed in domestic violence every day in Brazil — and that some 41,500 women were murdered by partners between 1997 and 2007.

The government has in recent years sought to curb such violence. In 2006, it passed the so-called “Maria da Penha law,” which greatly strengthened penalties against perpetrators and improved protective measures for women. The law was named after Maria da Penha Maia

Fernandes, who fought a 20-year battle for justice after she was shot in the spine by her husband and became paraplegic.

As part of its effort to implement the law and fight domestic violence, the government has funded a series of training seminars to help police, social workers, and officials in the legal system to better understand the law and improve their response — and a number of Bahá’ís have been closely involved in this effort.

In 2001, a group of Bahá’ís helped to found the National Forum on Human Rights Education, a coalition of NGOs and individuals dedicated to promoting human rights generally. As part of its work, the Forum has organized a series of capacity-building seminars on combatting domestic violence.



**A seminar** in São Paulo in 2007.

With support from government grants, those seminars have been praised for their distinctive approach, which stressed a learning mode that focused on the sharing of information among the various participants, and which also emphasized human rights and moral values.

“The seminar helped me to identify problems and take new ideas and concepts to strengthen the network of care to the victims of violence,” said Vanessa Motta, a lawyer with the Referral Center for Women Victims of Violence in Rio Branco, Acre.

## Principle of equality

The seminars not only examined international treaties and national laws but also stressed the importance of understanding the equality of women and men as a moral and spiritual principle.

“One goal we had was to frame the issue and have discussions around the theme of the equality of women and men,” said Mariana Pereira, a Bahá’í who has served as the Forum’s project coordinator.

That emphasis on equality opened the door to deeper understanding of the issue for many participants.

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**“It is clear that one of the problems of discrimination against women is related to moral values rooted in society for many years.”**

—Terezinha Pionti, State Council for Women Rights of Mato Grosso do Sul

“It is clear that one of the problems of discrimination against women is related to moral values rooted in society for many years,” said Terezinha Pionti, an attorney with the State Council for Women Rights of Mato Grosso do Sul.

## Community-based effort

Ms. Pereira said the effort to fight domestic violence was in part inspired by the Bahá’í teachings on the equality of women and men.



**Seminar participants were largely composed of police officials, lawyers, prosecutors, and social service workers who are involved on the front lines of combatting and treating domestic violence. Shown above are participants at a 2007 seminar in Recife.**

Early in the decade, she noted, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Brazil, the community’s national governing council, wrote two letters to the community discussing the issue of domestic violence.

In 2001, Bahá’ís sponsored an initial seminar on the issue to train legal workers in Brazil about domestic violence. It was undertaken in partnership with the Tahirih Justice Center, a US-based, Bahá’í-inspired NGO dealing with women’s issues.

In 2006, Bahá’ís worked with the Forum to organize another seminar to train prosecutors, judges, and lawyers for the protection of women involved in domestic violence. More than 100 legal officers from around Brazil participated in the seminar, which was held in September 2006 with funding from the newly established federal Special Secretariat for Women. It was the first national seminar on the issue after the Maria da Penha law was passed.

*Continued next page*

The success of that event led to two more seminars in 2007, in Recife and São Paulo, also funded by the federal Secretariat, with a grant of US\$35,300.

“The Special Secretariat for Women was particularly supportive of this initiative because, of all the organizations working with women and domestic violence, the Bahá’í community was one of the few that had thought to target representatives from the judicial system,” said Catherine Honeyman, who did a special report on these and other activities for the Bahá’í community of Brazil.

Recife and São Paulo were chosen because of their relatively high level of domestic violence. “In Recife that year, there were more than 60 women murdered as a consequence of domestic violence,” said Ms. Pereira.

Some 122 professionals in the legal system participated in the Recife seminar, and 175 in the São Paulo event.

Each covered the following topics: understanding the cycle of violence and aggression; national and international legislation, especially the Maria da Penha law; the role of the legal system in protecting women; and the discussion of good practices that can be applied countrywide.

In 2009, when the Bahá’ís and the Forum organized another series of



**A poster for the seminar in São Paulo in 2007.**



**Women who have suffered from domestic violence participated in a panel discussion at a 2008 seminar in São Paulo.**

seminars, coordinators tried to incorporate what they have learned from previous events. Among other things, they sought to create an atmosphere where different regional practices could be shared and new partnerships could be forged.

**“Working to combat domestic violence requires, above all, a philosophical change in how we understand and relate ourselves with others and with their differences.”**

— Fernanda Mendes, Referral Center for Women, Salvador, Bahia

“Brazil is a very big country, and we found that there were different practices in the south and different practices in the north,” said Ms. Pereira. “So networking and exchanging experiences was really important.”

The seminars in 2009 were held in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul; Manaus, Amazonas; and Florianópolis, Santa Catarina.

Ms. Pereira said the seminar in Manaus was distinctive for the involvement of indigenous women, who are not covered by the Maria da Penha law because they are under federal jurisdiction. “For the first time, we

could hear what they had to say, of the difficulties they faced,” she said.

Participants in the seminars have praised their wide-ranging, integrative approach. “Working to combat domestic violence requires, above all, a philosophical change in how we understand and relate ourselves with others and with their differences,” said Fernanda Mendes, an attorney with the Referral Center for Women in Salvador, Bahia.

“Mainly, it is necessary to avoid the stereotypes that surround us. On the other hand, we must put an end to the culture of violence and also question the male/female values that are so settled and fixed in our society, by trying to leave behind this duality,” she said.

## In Iran, the bulldozing of 50 Bahá'í homes is only part of the story

### IN BRIEF

- **The demolition of 50 Bahá'í homes in the small Iranian village of Ivel reflects a continuing government-sponsored campaign of persecution**
- **The Bahá'ís of Ivel sought for years to live side by side with their Muslim neighbors in peace – and also to contribute to the betterment of the community at large**

**T**he demolition of 50 Bahá'í homes in small northern Iranian farming village of Ivel in June drew expressions of outrage from around the world.

The BBC used the incident to introduce a general story about the wide-ranging and intensifying persecution faced by Bahá'ís under Iran's current fundamentalist regime.

Numerous websites and blogs added their own condemnation of the action. A video posted on YouTube by Human Rights Activists, for example, showed piles of rubble that were once houses, some ablaze, after being razed by unidentified men using at least four bucket-loaders.

Behind the incident, however, is a wider story of how the Bahá'ís of Ivel have long endured persecution by

fantatical elements from outside, all the while getting along well with their Muslim neighbors. At the same time, they have sought to contribute to the betterment of the community at large, through projects like a school and community bathhouse.

In its earliest days, Ivel was the summer residence for sheep farmers from the surrounding region of Mazandaran. There have been Bahá'ís in the village for more than a 150 years. Indeed, at one point, Bahá'ís comprised about half of Ivel's total population — and they lived side by side with their Muslim neighbors in relative harmony.

Unfortunately, outside elements strongly inimical to the Faith have periodically sought to stir up the local population against the Bahá'í



**Images taken from a video**, shot on a mobile telephone in the village of Ivel in June, show fiercely burning fires and several Bahá'í-owned properties reduced to rubble.



**The village of Ivel, Mazandaran, Iran, has been home to a farming community for centuries, and Bahá'ís for over 160 years.**

community, resulting in intermittent persecution.

In 1941, for example, gangs from outside roused local citizens to attack the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'ís were arrested, severely beaten and subjected to extortion; their houses and belongings were plundered. Finally, they were banished to a village seven kilometers away. When the situation eased some months later, the Bahá'ís returned to their homes and farms.

### **“Unclean” cattle**

In the mid-1950s, an individual belonging to the specifically anti-Bahá'í Hojattieh Society arrived in Ivel and began to agitate against the Bahá'ís. When his efforts failed to drive a wedge between the Muslims and the Bahá'ís, he argued that Bahá'í cattle were “unclean” and should not be allowed to share the pasture.

For a few days, the cattle belonging to the Bahá'ís were confined to their barns while those of the Muslims went to graze. The Bahá'ís referred the matter to the village head, appealing for compassion to be shown to the animals. A decision was made to have the cows enter the pasture from opposite sides. But as might be expected, this did not accord with the natural instincts of the livestock, who continued to graze together.

Throughout the years, the Bahá'ís actively contributed to the betterment of life in their village. At one point, for example, they established a school for local children, which was open to all children, regardless of their religion.

By 1946, the Bahá'í school operated six elementary level classes, serving some 120 pupils from Ivel and nearby villages. Later that year, as part of a general effort to consolidate rural education, the Iranian government assumed responsibility for the school.

In 1961, the Bahá'ís completed a bath house for use by the villagers, which included modifications to the local reservoir and the introduction of modernizations to improve the levels of hygiene and the general health of the people.

Following Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, the situation for Bahá'ís in Ivel deteriorated. Land was confiscated and attempts to regain it proved unsuccessful. Bahá'ís were denied access to health clinics and other institutions that they themselves had helped establish. Muslim children were encouraged by their teacher to harm their Bahá'í classmates. When parents protested, the teacher found other means to persecute his Bahá'í pupils, including failing them in their exams.

In June 1983, the Bahá'ís were forced out of their homes and transported by bus to the nearest major city, Sari.

When they arrived, the authorities made them go back. Returning to Ivel, they were locked into a local mosque. More than 130 of them, including children and the elderly, were held captive for three days without food and water.

When pressure to make them recant their faith failed, they were allowed to return home. However, that same night, they were attacked by villagers. Since that time, many of the Ivel Bahá'ís have resided nearby and return only in the summer to plant and harvest their crops and tend their properties.

### **Part of a wider campaign**

“What we are witnessing in Ivel, and the surrounding region of Mazandaran, is part of a wider campaign to humiliate and dishearten all the Bahá'ís and prevent them from practicing their faith in any way whatsoever,” said Diane Ala'i, representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. “The government has certainly demonstrated thus far that if it is not behind it, it is either unwilling to stop it or incapable of doing so.”

There are, however, many villagers in Ivel who are deeply troubled by these developments. In an interview with the *Roos Online* website, Natoli Derakhshan, a Bahá'í from Ivel, paid tribute to those who have expressed dismay and concern at the ill-treatment of their Bahá'í neighbors: “These days many of our Muslim folks sat together with us with tearful eyes, and apologized to us, and held our hands! We are thankful to them all.”

Another Bahá'í from Ivel recently said that during many long years of farming, neighbors — Muslim and Bahá'í alike — often helped each other during times of difficulty.

“Among us residents, there was no difference,” Yusefali Ahmadi said in interview with Human Rights Activists. “Although our beliefs were different, it never caused any difficulty in cooperation. Our tablecloth was open to all as was our house door. Development was for the whole village; all benefitted, for we were all related.”

## Review: *The Empathic Civilization*

*Civilization*, continued from page 16

consciousness as its inhabitants embraced Christianity.

“Cast adrift from their tribal bonds and thrown together with people of different cultures from around the empire, large numbers of individuals suddenly found themselves alone in dense urban environments and without a sense of identity,” Mr. Rifkin writes.

“What was missing was a powerful new narrative that could put every single individual at the center of a compelling cosmic story of creation, tribulation, judgment, and redemption, and, by doing so, recast the very meaning of human existence....it would be a young sect calling itself Christians that would take Rome and the empire by storm with their story...”

Later, Mr. Rifkin traces what he calls the First, Second and Third Industrial Revolutions, each based on a successive energy/communications regime: coal/print; oil/radio-television; and, now, potentially, alternative energy/the Internet.

This third revolution, he writes, will be marked by a “distributed” model of energy production (and use) that will rely on the new assumption that human nature is not inherently selfish, but rather that people “want to collaborate with others, often freely, for the sheer joy of contributing to the common good.”

As such, Mr. Rifkin believes that the next stage of civilization is one where our “empathic predisposition” will offer “an opportunity to increasingly bond the human race into a single extended family.” The alternative, he writes, is “planetary collapse” in the face of “a rapidly accelerating juggernaut” of climate change and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Bahá'ís will recognize and appreciate much in *The Empathic Civilization*. The idea that history has moved forward in a series of successive and ever greater civilizations, each marked by increasing cohesiveness and social complexity, outwardly describes the Bahá'í view of history, which is one of

ever-enlarging and increasingly united social entities, moving under the guidance of the Creator, from tribe to city-state to nation-state and, soon, to an inevitable world commonwealth.

Mr. Rifkin's description of an innate faculty that promotes cooperation and compassion is also something Bahá'ís will recognize. But where Mr. Rifkin uses the word “empathic,” Bahá'ís would substitute the word “spiritual.”

Bahá'ís also believe that humans need not be captive to the animal instincts that evolutionary biologists have so well catalogued. Rather, if our spiritual side is nurtured (through prayer, reflection on the holy writings, and moral education — in other words by following the teachings of religion), new levels of love, compassion, and cooperation can indeed be reached.

However, where Rifkin believes “empathic consciousness” came about through evolution, as a “genetic predisposition,” Bahá'ís believe any such empathic impulse stems from a Divine spark that resides in all of us, commonly known as the soul.

In this light, it is worth noting that much of the evidence offered by Mr. Rifkin to support his theory also supports the idea of a soul.

For example, Mr. Rifkin spends little time reviewing how evolutionary biologists explain altruism. Instead, he connects empathic consciousness with humanity's evolving religious beliefs, and traces its emergence through artistic expression, which some say is nurtured by the soul.

Likewise, his outline of the latest discoveries in brain science and psychology only deepen the mystery of empathy's origin, and so support the existence of a hidden soul as much as an unrealized biological predisposition.

One is reminded of the classic proof of God. If you see a watch, there must be a watchmaker. Mr. Rifkin has successfully described in some detail the effect of a largely unseen power on human societies, past, present and future. And while he stops short of identifying this as God or spirituality, many readers will surely do so.



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# What the fall of the Roman empire tells us about humanity's global future

## *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*

— By Jeremy Rifkin  
Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin,  
New York

### IN BRIEF

- **Economist and thinker Jeremy Rifkin argues human beings have an innate “empathic consciousness” that is proven by history and neurobiology**
- **Facing global crises such as climate change, humanity's only hope is extend our empathic embrace to all of humanity**
- **Otherwise, there is little hope of overcoming the “entropic debt” accumulated by the overuse of fossil fuels**

Imagine for a moment that human beings have a faculty deep inside that, if properly nurtured, could reliably counteract our seemingly innate tendency towards selfishness and aggression, instead pushing us towards ever greater cooperation and altruism.

In an age when most Western intellectuals have accepted wholesale the Darwinian, materialist view of human nature that says we are biologically primed to put self-interest first, such an idea might seem naive and utopian.

But in his latest book, economist and thinker Jeremy Rifkin argues that there is such a faculty — which he calls “empathic consciousness” — and its cultivation holds the key to humanity's long term survival.

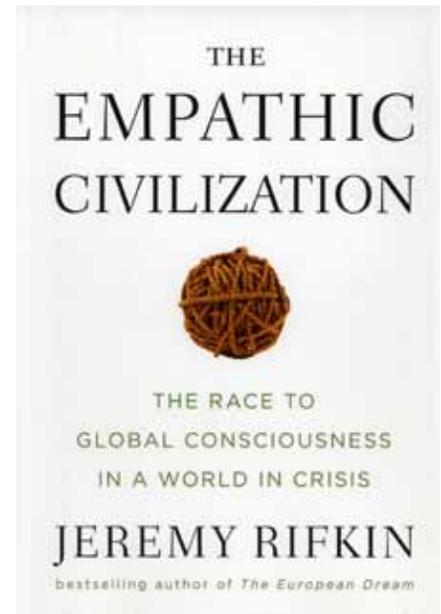
*The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* is set firmly in the context of the wide-ranging and interconnected crises facing humanity, from the threat of global warming to nuclear proliferation.

But its sweep extends far beyond the usual “global crisis” book, covering everything from the rise and fall of ancient civilizations to the latest discoveries in neurobiology and psychology.

Mr. Rifkin's goal is to show that our innate empathic identification with others is a far stronger trait than widely believed. Strong enough, he believes, to guide humanity into an age of cooperation — if we work at it.

Human civilization, he writes, is on the verge of collapse, faced with a massive “entropic debt” that has been accumulated through the overuse of fossil fuels, short-sighted environmental policies, and the emphasis on material wealth over genuine human happiness. But empathy can provide a corrective.

One of Rifkin's themes is that humanity has been through this kind of



a transition before. New technologies spur productivity and growth but also set the stage for collapse once a particular resource base is exhausted. However, each new phase also brings with it a higher level of empathic consciousness.

“Throughout history, new energy regimes have converged with new communications revolutions, creating ever more complex societies. More technologically advanced civilizations, in turn, have brought diverse people together, heightened the empathic sensitivity, and expanded human consciousness. But these increasingly more complicated milieus require more extensive energy use and speed us towards resource depletion.”

Mr. Rifkin examines the rise and fall of great civilizations to show how each took humanity to a new stage of cosmopolitanism (or empathic consciousness) even as each also sowed the seeds for its own downfall.

The multi-ethnic Roman Empire, he writes, produced a surge in empathic

*Civilization*, continued on page 15