

# ONE COUNTRY

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” – Bahá’u’lláh

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

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For more than 30 years, the Iranian government has blocked young Bahá’ís from obtaining a university education. Shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Bahá’í students were banned from public and private colleges in Iran — and Bahá’í faculty members were fired.

In response, the Iranian Bahá’í community formed in 1987 the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), an informal university where classes were held mostly in people’s homes, taught by unemployed Bahá’í professors on a volunteer basis.

For the most part, the government has turned a blind eye to this effort, although authorities did try unsuccessfully in 1998 to close it down. The government, which was entirely aware of BIHE, seemed content to allow Bahá’ís a tiny space in which to educate their youth.

In recent months, however, the authorities have undertaken a renewed suppression of the BIHE, prompting international expressions of concern and offering new evidence of Iran’s seemingly endless disregard for human rights of any sort.

The new clampdown began in May, when the government without warning raided more than 30 Bahá’í homes where the Institute operated, arresting 14 faculty and staff.

In June, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology declared that the BIHE was “illegal.” Then, in July, 11 of BIHE detainees were accused of “conspiracy against national security” and “conspiracy against the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

“Bahá’ís have been banned from higher education for three decades,” said Diane Ala’i, the Bahá’í International Community’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva, in a press release in July. “And now, their own peaceful initiative — to meet

**Crackdown**, continued on page 12



In Brazil, campaigners join hands around almost 8,000 photographs of Iran’s seven imprisoned Bahá’í leaders at Rio’s Copacabana Beach, 19 June 2011.

# Reflections on recent events in Egypt

## IN BRIEF

- **There is no shortage of self-interested forces aiming to prevent Egyptians from determining their own future, whether colonialism, religious orthodoxy, or consumerism**
- **It is vital, therefore, that all Egyptians endeavor to achieve a broad consensus on the operating principles that can shape a new model for society**
- **A mature society demonstrates one feature above all others: a recognition of the oneness of humanity**
- **From that flow other essential principles, such as the equality of women and men, universal education, and a balance between science and religion**
- **What is needed is a broadly based national conversation, extending to the grassroots, on these points**

*[Editor's Note: The following is an abbreviated version of an open letter sent by the Bahá'í community of Egypt to their fellow citizens in April 2011. The full letter can be read at: <http://www.bahai-egypt.org/2011/04/open-letter-to-people-of-egypt.html>]*

**T**he events of recent months have provided us, the Bahá'ís of Egypt, with an opportunity we have never experienced before: to communicate directly with you, our brothers and sisters. We rejoice that we are able to make a humble contribution to the conversation which has now begun about Egypt's future and to share some perspectives, drawn from our own experience and that of Bahá'ís throughout the world, as to the prerequisites for walking the path towards lasting material and spiritual prosperity.

Whatever directly motivated the rapid change that has occurred, the outcome demonstrates the collective desire of us all, the people of Egypt, to exercise greater control over our destiny. Our collective history, as Egyptians, Arabs, and Africans, has taught us that there is no shortage of self-interested forces in the world that would prevent us from determining our own future or, alternatively, would invite us to voluntarily abdicate this responsibility. Colonialism, religious orthodoxy, authoritarian rule, and outright tyranny have all played their part in the past. Today, the "gentler" force of consumerism and the erosion of morality which it fosters are equally capable of holding us back, under the pretense of making us more free.

## A global phenomenon

The events that have taken place in Egypt can be seen as a response to forces that are, in fact, drawing the entire human race towards greater maturity and interdependence. The movement towards greater maturity is a global phenomenon.

What are the choices before us? Many models of collective living are on offer and being championed by various interested parties. Are we to move towards an individualistic, fragmented society, wherein all feel liberated to pursue their own interests, even at the expense of the common good? Will we be tempted by the lures of materialism and its beholden agent, consumerism? Will we opt for a system that feeds on religious fanaticism? Are we prepared to allow an elite to emerge that will be oblivious to our collective aspirations, and may even seek to manipulate our desire for change? Or, will the process of change be allowed to lose momentum, dissolve into factional squabbling, and crumble under the weight of institutional inertia?

Too often, change brought about by popular protest eventually results in disappointment. This is not because the movement that provided the catalyst for change lacks unity—indeed, its ability to foster unity among disparate peoples and interests is the essential feature that ensured its success—but rather because the realization quickly dawns that it is far easier to find common cause against the status quo than it is to agree upon what should replace it. It is vital that we endeavor to achieve broad consensus on the operating principles that are to shape a new model for our society.

A mature society demonstrates one feature above all others: a recognition of the oneness of humanity.

How fortunate, then, that the most abiding memory of recent months is not of religious divisions or ethnic conflict, but of differences being put aside in favour of a common cause. Our instinctive ability, as a people, to recognize the truth that we all belong to one human family served us well. Nevertheless, to develop institutions, agencies, and social structures that promote the oneness of humanity is an altogether greater challenge. Far from being an expression of vague and pious hope, this principle informs the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. Its genesis lies in the recognition that we were all created out of the same substance by the one Creator, and therefore, it is indefensible for one person, tribe, or nation to claim superiority over another.

The ramifications of this fundamental truth are so profound that many other vital principles, essential for the future development of Egypt, can be derived from it. A prime example is the equality of men and women. Does anything retard progress in our country more efficiently than the persistent exclusion of women from full participation in the affairs of the nation? Redressing this balance will by itself bring about improvement in every aspect of Egyptian life: religious, cultural, social, economic, and political. Like the bird that cannot fly if one wing is weaker than the other, so humanity's ability to scale the heights of real attainment are severely impeded so long as women are denied the opportunities afforded to men.

Nowhere could the equality of the sexes more helpfully be established than in education, which exists to enable men and women of every background to fulfill their innate potential to contribute to the progress of society. If it is to succeed, it must offer adequate preparation for participation in the economic life of the nation, but so, too, it must possess a robust moral dimension. Education cannot be allowed to be the means whereby disunity and hatred of others are instilled into innocent minds. With the right approach,

A street scene in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, where Bahá'ís recently addressed their fellow citizens, urging them to consult on the basis of principle, not passion, as they re-create their nation.



it can also become an effective instrument for protecting future generations from the insidious blight of corruption that so conspicuously afflicts present-day Egypt.

Related to the topic of education is the interaction between science and religion, twin sources of insight that humanity can draw upon as it seeks to achieve progress. We possess a proud history of fostering a spirit of rational and scientific enquiry—with admirable results in the areas of farming and medicine, to name but two—while retaining a strong religious tradition and respect for the values promulgated by the world's great faiths. There is nothing in such values that should incline us toward irrational thinking or fanaticism.

Our nation is blessed by an abundance of youth. Conditions must be nurtured so that opportunities for meaningful employment multiply, talent is harnessed, and possibilities to progress are accessed on the basis of merit, not privilege. Disenchantment will grow if, because of persistent corruption, inequality, and neglect, the efforts youth make to improve the conditions of families, communities, and neighborhoods are thwarted at every turn.

Each individual comes into the world as a trust of the whole, and the collective resources of the human race should therefore be expended for the benefit of all, not just a fraction. Neglect of this ideal has a particularly destabilizing influence on society, as extremes of wealth and poverty

exacerbate existing social tensions and provoke unrest.

## Consultation: the challenge

The challenge before us, then, is to initiate a process of consultation about the principles that are to inform the reshaping of our society. This is a painstaking task. However, we can be confident that every sincere effort invested for this purpose will be richly rewarded by the release, from our own selves, of a fresh measure of those constructive energies on which our future depends. In such a broadly based national conversation—engaging people at all levels, in villages and in cities, in neighborhoods and in the home, extending to the grassroots of society and drawing in every concerned citizen—it will be vital that the process not move too quickly to the pragmatic and the expedient, and not be reduced to the deals and decisions involved in the distribution of power among a new elite who would presume to become the arbiters of our future.

The ongoing and wide-scale involvement of the population in such a consultative process will go a long way towards persuading the citizenry that policy-makers have the creation of a just society at heart. Given the opportunity to participate in such a process, we will be confirmed in our newly awakened consciousness that we have ownership of our own future and come to realize the collective power we already possess to transform ourselves.

— *The Bahá'ís of Egypt*

# UN Commission discusses ethics behind the environmental crisis

## IN BRIEF

- **During the 2011 UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the importance of the moral and ethical dimensions of climate change were widely discussed**
- **As its contribution, the Bahá'í International Community sponsored a panel discussion on the issue, exploring how values ultimately transform and influence attitudes and behaviors**

**U**NITED NATIONS — Focusing solely on the material aspects of the environmental crisis, while ignoring its moral and ethical dimensions, will not ensure humanity's long term survival.

That was among the perspectives under discussion at this year's UN Commission on Sustainable Development, held 2–13 May 2011.

"We have passed beyond the global tipping point that we have been anticipating for decades," said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute and a special adviser to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "We are now living on a planet of environmental turmoil."

Professor Sachs, addressing the Commission on 11 May, noted the recent increase in the number of floods, droughts, and food and water shortages around the world.

"Fundamentally, we have a global ethics crisis," he said, because, "while we need to find a path towards

sustainable development, we are scrambling instead for resources and advantage."

Ashok Khosla, a former director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), also highlighted the need to recognize the values underlying sustainable development.

"We have to go beyond the concept of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product)," said Dr. Khosla. "It measures all the things that don't count in our real lives. Whatever it is we really care about — happiness and love — doesn't figure in the GDP at all."

## "Making the Invisible Visible"

A panel discussion — also held on 11 May and sponsored by the Bahá'í International Community — sought to explore ways in which cultural, educational, and spiritual components can be brought into the sustainable development discourse.

Panelists discuss how to bring issues of ethics into the discourse on sustainable development at a side event during the 2011 UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Shown, left to right, are Luis Flores Mimica, Consumers International, Latin American Office (Chile); Victoria Thoresen of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (Norway); Elona Hoover, Researcher, ESDinds Project, University of Brighton (UK); and Vanessa Timmer, co-founder and executive director of the One Earth Initiative (Canada). Duncan Hanks of the Canadian Bahá'í International Development Agency is at the podium.



Titled “Making the Invisible Visible: Values and the Transition to Sustainable Consumption and Production,” the panel was moderated by Duncan Hanks of the Canadian Bahá’í International Development Agency.

“There is no doubt of the importance of understanding and getting the material consideration of this discussion right — to adequately address the policy considerations, legal frameworks, financial mechanisms,” said Mr. Hanks.

“However, to allow the discussion to focus merely on the material aspects...only covers part of the story.

“We are hearing new discussions and language about the dynamic coherence between the material and value-based or spiritual dimensions of sustainable consumption and production, between the hardware and the software — the physical and the spiritual — and we are witnessing an increased willingness to explore not only the policy and technical ramifications but the very values that ultimately influence attitudes and transform behaviors,” he said.

Five other panelists from four continents offered thoughts about ways that the consideration of values can be brought into discussions about sustainable consumption and production, in order to motivate the changes in human behavior needed to sustain life on the planet.

“The values debate is at the heart of what our future is going to look like,” said Vanessa Timmer, co-founder and executive director of the One Earth Initiative, a non-profit research and advocacy group based in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

She noted that values and behaviour are intimately connected, and that a discussion of values also frames the discussion — and the direction — of behavior.

Researchers, said Ms. Timmer, have found that if the argument is made for buying a hybrid car on the idea that it



The Bahá’í International Community (BIC) delegation to the 19th UN Commission on Sustainable Development, held in New York from 2–13 May 2011. Back row, left to right: Julia Berger, BIC; Taraneh Ashraf, BIC; Nadia O’Mara, Ireland; Duncan Hanks, Canada; Peter Adriance, USA; Daniella Hiche, Brazil. Front row, left to right: Ineke Gijsbers, UK; May Akale, BIC; Kiara Worth, Papua New Guinea; Nur Shodjai, Canada; Victoria Thoresen, Norway.

will save money — instead of also saving the environment — the discussion is kept on material grounds.

“The idea is to use both — give numbers but embed them within a larger conversation about how this is going to help us move towards a new sense of community and affiliation with others,” she said.

Victoria Thoresen of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living in Norway analyzed a series of specific values that have a bearing on sustainable development — including detachment, moderation, trust, justice, and hope.

The concept of justice, she said, “provides us with the possibility to move from the self-centeredness that dominates our world to a way of being, a mode of sharing, a way of moving beyond our complicated, confused world where hope barely exists.”

Also on the panel were: Luis Flores Mimica, Consumers International, Latin American Office (Chile); Elona Hoover, Researcher, ESDinds Project: Developing Values-based indicators for Sustainable Development, University

of Brighton (UK); and Kiara Worth, Sustainable Development Specialist (Papua New Guinea). The meeting was co-sponsored by PERL, One Earth, and Consumers International.

As another contribution to the discussion at this year’s Commission, the Bahá’í International Community called further attention to its 2010 statement, “Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism.” See <http://news.bahai.org/story/770>.

## In Israel, a restored Shrine is unveiled, dazzling visitors and pilgrims



### IN BRIEF

- **After two years of restoration, the historic Shrine of the Báb in Haifa has been unveiled, revealing 12,000 new, gilded tiles**
- **The structure, with a foundation that dates to 1909, was also reinforced against earthquakes with a new concrete, steel, and carbon fiber retrofit**

**H**AIFA, Israel — After more than two years of extensive restoration work, Haifa's golden-domed Bahá'í Shrine was recently unveiled to the delight of visitors, pilgrims and residents of the city.

Early on 12 April 2011, the final set of covers was removed from the Shrine's dome, revealing almost 12,000 new, gilded tiles, crowning the immaculately restored building on Mount Carmel.

"Today the 'Queen of Carmel', concealed from the gaze of the public for the larger part of the project, is unveiled and resplendent again..." announced the Universal House of Justice, after visiting the Shrine to offer prayers of thanksgiving.

Haifa's Mayor, Advocate Yona Yahav, later joined civic dignitaries and guests at a celebratory reception, held in the city's historic German Templar

The Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, newly unveiled after more than two years of extensive restoration and conservation work. In 2008, the Shrine was inscribed — along with the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh near Acre — as a site of "outstanding universal value" on the UN's World Heritage list.

colony with its spectacular view of the Shrine and its terraced gardens.

"I am the first Mayor of Haifa who was actually born here," said Mr. Yahav. "In 1954, I witnessed the Shrine's superstructure being built. To see these renovations is very touching. They are of the utmost importance."

The Shrine of the Báb and its gardens are renowned the world over for their beauty and tranquillity. In 2008, it was inscribed — along with the Shrine of Baha'u'llah near Acre — as a site of "outstanding universal value" on the United Nation's World Heritage

list. Last year alone some 760,000 tourists and 7,500 Bahá'í pilgrims and visitors were welcomed here.

"The Shrine affects the whole set up of Haifa," said Mayor Yahav. "It is the core and symbol of this tolerant and multi-cultural city."

## Two years ahead of schedule

More than 50 years of exposure to Haifa's climate and environmental conditions had taken their toll on the superstructure's stonework and dome when work began in 2008.

Saeid Samadi, project architect and manager, said experts estimated such a restoration would normally take five to six years. "We originally targeted April 2013 for its completion. It is a tribute to the total dedication and unity of everyone involved that the project has been completed in less than three years.

"The team truly appreciated the importance of the place and never forgot where they were working," said Mr. Samadi. "We were all inspired by the Bahá'í principle that everything should be created to the highest state of perfection."

The project required the restoration and conservation of the interior and exterior of the original 1909 structure, as well as measures to strengthen the Shrine against seismic forces. An entirely new retrofit design — combining concrete, steel and carbon fiber wrap technology — was needed for the whole building, from its foundation and original masonry to its octagon, drum and dome. More than 120 rock anchors were fixed into the mountain behind newly fortified retaining walls.

"Some 80,000 man-hours were spent on significantly improving the Shrine's resistance to earthquakes" said Mr. Samadi. "but it is all concealed from view and does not affect the beauty and grandeur of the original architecture at all."



Volunteers were specially chosen for the meticulous stone restoration work at the Shrine of the Báb. More than 50,000 man-hours were spent on the stonework by restoration office staff and volunteers, who came from many countries around the world.

## Restoring the stone and dome

More than 50,000 man-hours were spent on the stonework by the staff of the restoration office and volunteers — including many young people — from Australia, Canada, China, Ecuador, Germany, India, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Vanuatu, all trained by expert conservators. Every square centimeter of the building's exterior was checked and restored.

"For the original superstructure, Carrara marble was wanted but it was not easy to come by after the Second World War," said Mr. Samadi. "The only stone available was Chiampo marble. When we were researching to see how it has been restored in Europe, we discovered that — because of its nature — it has not been used anywhere else for exterior cladding, just for flooring. There was no background knowledge on how to do it."

New techniques also had to be developed to replace the Shrine's golden tiles. For two years, efforts were made to see if the badly eroded old tiles could be restored. "We checked the condition of every single tile but, as a result of their

exposure to the elements, many were broken beyond repair and the rest could not be restored back to their original beauty," said Mr. Samadi.

After several years of research, a Portuguese firm was contracted to produce new tiles in more than 120 different shapes and sizes. Leading-edge technology was employed to manufacture each tile from pure porcelain, covered with layers of glazing and gold solution, and finished with a highly durable final coating.

"The company had never done anything like this before," said Mr. Samadi. "They are renowned for museum-quality porcelain artefacts. But the result is perfect. Not only are the tiles beautiful, they are five to six times more abrasion-resistant than the originals."

## In India, iconic “lotus” temple is the focus of a worldwide campaign



A poster of the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi depicted on the side of a bus in Ottawa, Canada, as part of the Indian government's global "Incredible India" campaign.

### IN BRIEF

- **Coinciding with its 25th anniversary, the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi is featured on posters in 14 countries, from South Africa to Japan, the USA to Singapore.**
- **It is part of an Indian government campaign to showcase the cultural diversity and special achievements of the country**

**N**EW DELHI — Step onto a bus in Ottawa, Canada; open a magazine in Paris, France; or look upwards at Rimini's railway station in Italy — all around the world, India's Bahá'í House of Worship is capturing the public's attention.

To coincide with its 25th anniversary year, the lotus-shaped temple is being depicted on striking posters in 14 countries from South Africa to Japan, from the USA to Singapore.

It is all part of the Incredible India campaign, the Indian government's international effort to showcase the cultural diversity and special achievements of the country.

"India represents the spirituality of all mankind," said the Honorable Union Minister for Tourism, Subodh Kant Sahai, "and the Bahá'í temple is the one place where people belonging

to any faith or religion can go for meditation or prayer."

The Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi opened in December 1986 after more than six years of construction. It is estimated that 70 million people have visited the temple since its opening — averaging 8,000 to 10,000 every day — making it one of the world's most visited buildings.

"This is a unique place to be visited," said Sultan Ahmed, Minister of State for Tourism. "It has world-class architecture, serene surroundings and an elevating atmosphere."

The temple is one of only seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world, open to all people for silent worship and contemplation.

This message of inclusiveness is also a feature of the Incredible India campaign, said Naznene Rowhani,

Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India.

“Everybody who sees these posters will know that it is a temple, but more importantly, also what it stands for and symbolizes. These posters proclaim it to be the ‘Bahá'í House of Worship — India’s symbol of communal harmony,’ or ‘India’s symbol of the oneness of humankind,’ or of ‘unity of religions,’” said Ms. Rowhani.

## A message of peace

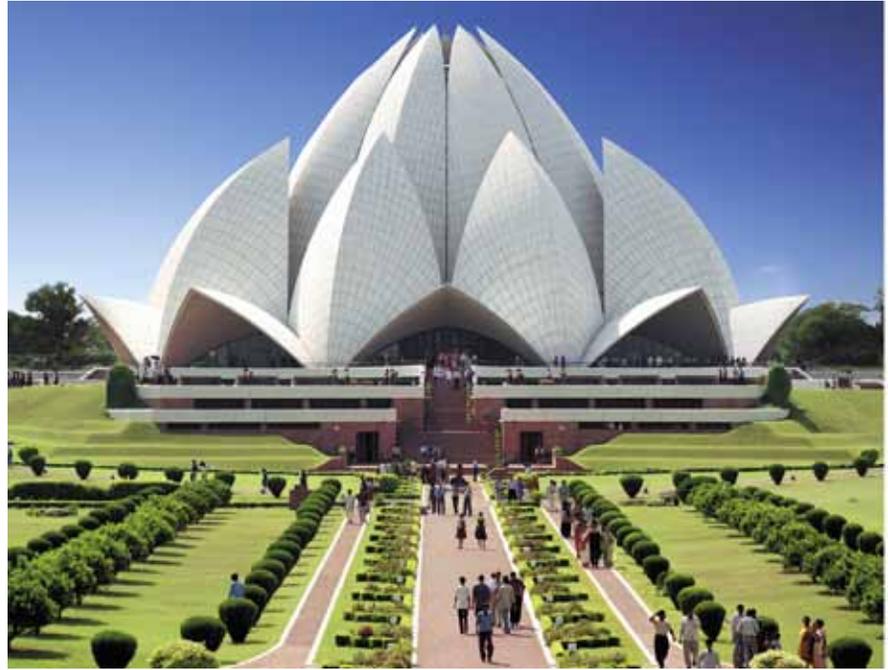
Immediately following the Incredible India initiative, the image of the temple will also be appearing as part of another campaign in Delhi itself. The Delhi Meri Jaan (“My Beloved Delhi”) initiative was launched last year.

“We commemorate 25 years of the temple and 100 years of the existence of the modern Delhi that we have today. It’s a great coincidence.” explained Shelia Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi.

“This is a beautiful building. It has become an iconic symbol.”

The appeal of the temple is that it “encompasses everybody,” the Chief Minister added.

“The Bahá'í Faith is a very attractive faith. The message it gives to mankind



The Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, one of the most visited sites in India, is 25 years old this year.

is one of peace, prosperity and happiness...” she said.

Around 4,000 visitors from more than 50 countries are expected to attend the 25th anniversary celebrations at the House of Worship in November.

“As these poster campaigns clearly show, the temple belongs to everybody

— every religion, creed and people,” said Naznene Rowhani, “so it is natural that the celebration of its 25th anniversary will also be inclusive of everybody.”

Below: Passengers arriving at New Delhi’s international airport now encounter the image of the Bahá'í House of Worship, “India’s symbol of communal harmony,” as they await their baggage.



## In Toronto, a high-level academic conference explores “othering” of Iranian Bahá’ís

Mohamad Tavakoli — a professor of history and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations — delivers the opening address at the conference on “Intellectual Othering and the Bahá’í Question in Iran,” which commenced at the University of Toronto on Friday, 1 July. Seated on the panel are, from left to right, Linda Northrup, University of Toronto; Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Maryland; and Abbas Amanat, Yale University.



### IN BRIEF

- **Top-level Iranian scholars from around the world gathered at the University of Toronto for a conference on the persecution of Iranian Bahá’ís**
- **The event examined how the ‘othering’ of Bahá’ís has become a mechanism to legitimize the state and create political-religious ideology**
- **Presentations ranged from early efforts to vilify Bahá’ís as colonialist agents to modern propaganda that falsely characterizes Bahá’ís as cultish**

**T**ORONTO — Iranian scholars, many from globally prominent universities, gathered in early July for an academic conference on the persecution of Iran’s Bahá’ís.

Titled “Intellectual Othering and the Bahá’í Question in Iran,” and held at the University of Toronto, the conference examined how Iranian authorities have sought to exclude Bahá’ís from social, political, cultural, and intellectual life by portraying them as outsiders in their own land — a process known as “othering.”

The event, held from 1-3 July 2011, was the first major academic conference at a top-ranked university to focus on the persecution of Iran’s Bahá’ís in any context.

“This conference is not a Bahá’í studies conference,” said its chief organizer, Mohamad Tavakoli. “It is an effort to understand the use of repression in the history of modern Iran and how the ‘othering’ of Bahá’ís has become a mechanism of mass mobilization for the legitimization of the state and for the creation of political-religious ideology.”

Dr. Tavakoli — a well-known scholar on Iran and the Middle East at the University of Toronto — said the idea for the conference came from his own research into the degree to which various Iranian groups had used anti-Bahá’í rhetoric and made a scapegoat of Bahá’ís to gain political power, both in the past and the present.

Within this framework, the talks and papers were presented by scholars from diverse religious backgrounds, including atheism, Bahá’í, Christianity, humanism, Islam and Judaism. The talks ranged across a wide territory: from early efforts to vilify Bahá’ís by painting them as colonialist agents of the British and Russians, to the use of modern propaganda techniques that, for example, falsely characterize Iranian Bahá’ís as part of a cult that uses “brainwashing” techniques to steal away Muslim children.

One presentation described how memoirs and oral histories by clerics have been used to demonize Bahá’ís since the 1979 Revolution. These memoirs, said Shahram Kholdi — a PhD candidate from the University of

Manchester in the United Kingdom — represent a large pool of literature, largely unexamined in the West, which has been used to create a revisionist narrative of the founding of the Islamic Republic, aimed at the faithful.

Attacking Bahá'ís — often using indirect language — is a frequent theme of these memoirs, said Mr. Kholdi. “Bahá'ís are often portrayed as foreign agents,” he said, explaining that Bahá'ís are described as part of an external force behind the oppressive measures of the Pahlavi regime. “So they use Bahá'ís to legitimize their own revolutionary history.”

Politicians also frequently used pogroms against Bahá'ís for political reasons, said Homa Katouzian, a professor of Oriental Studies at Oxford University, who examined a 1924 incident where an anti-Bahá'í demonstration led to the assassination of the American vice consul in Iran. Bahá'ís were “a particularly soft target,” he said.

## Historical parallels

Several speakers made comparisons between the oppression of Iranian Bahá'ís under the Islamic Republic and other historical efforts to portray a particular religious or ethnic group as outsiders — something that has often led to wider pogroms or worse.

The father of Rhoda Howard-Hassmann — a professor of international human rights at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada — was a Jewish refugee who fled Nazi Germany. Professor Howard-Hassmann said the descriptions she heard at the conference about abuses directed against Bahá'ís were all too familiar.

“The talk of the desecration of graves, the conspiracy theories, ...the accusation that they are a cult that

Farzaneh Milani, who teaches Persian literature and women's studies at the University of Virginia, addresses the conference on “Intellectual Othering and the Bahá'í Question in Iran,” held at the University of Toronto, 1-3 July 2011. Dr. Milani's presentation was part of a session on gender modernity.

is stealing children — these are all characteristics of extreme retribution, if not pre-genocide. This is a political phenomenon, caused by a regime and its manipulation of political beliefs. It is not something that simply exists among the people,” she said.

In his talk, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, a professor of Persian studies at the University of Maryland, examined the destruction of Bahá'í holy places and properties in Iran. He recounted a long list of Bahá'í sites that have been destroyed — from village Bahá'í centers in the late 19th century to the House of the Báb, one of the most sacred Bahá'í sites in the world, which was razed by mobs incited by Muslim clerics shortly after the Islamic Revolution.

Professor Karimi-Hakkak compared such demolitions to attacks on other major religious sites, such as the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, saying that their purpose was often to assert the power of the majority over the minority, and to place the minority in the category of the “other.”

When a Shiite believer destroys buildings or graves, he said “they demonstrate that religious minorities must obey them and they have no power to protect their holy sites or their revered graves.”

The relevance of the “Bahá'í question” to larger issues of religious intolerance and political repression worldwide was also explored, as participants considered what lessons can be learned from the Bahá'í experience.

Several contributors said they believed that the Bahá'í case now

exemplifies the increasing oppression that is being felt by all Iranians, especially since the crackdown that followed the 2009 presidential election. This has led many ordinary Iranians to sympathize and identify with Bahá'ís, they said.

“I think the atrocities committed against the Bahá'ís are being intuitively registered,” said Reza Afshari, a professor of history at Pace University in New York. “This has led to a growing recognition that human rights do matter and that their violations are by-products of the country's authoritarian rule and intolerance culture, mediated by the Shiite mullahs' direct intrusions into the realms of national politics.”

Ramin Jahanbegloo — a professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, who himself spent four months in prison in the Islamic Republic of Iran — spoke about the importance of including a discussion of the Bahá'í question in any future effort at national reconciliation.

Noted Iranian human rights lawyer Abdol-Karim Lahidji spoke about the need for greater respect for human rights in Iran — and the need to grant Bahá'ís full rights of citizenship.

“Freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, freedom of religion — and not to believe in any religion — has to be recognized,” he said. “If other people's rights are violated, you have to defend them too. This is the struggle of every single one of us.”



# Iran cracks down on efforts to provide higher education for Bahá'í youth

## IN BRIEF

- Iran has stepped up its crackdown on efforts by the Bahá'í community to educate its young people
- In May, authorities raided numerous homes where volunteer faculty and staff provide young Bahá'ís with an informal university education, arresting many of them and then declaring their effort illegal
- The Bahá'í International Community has issued an open letter to the Minister of Education, asking: "Why is the government so ruthless in the face of the earnestness of Bahá'í youth to obtain higher education?"
- Around the world, governments, academicians and others have condemned Iran's actions

**Crackdown**, continued from page one

a need created by the government's own actions — is branded a conspiracy against the state."

Government action against the BIHE continued through July and August. In all, around 80 Bahá'ís involved in the Institute's activities have been detained and interrogated. Those questioned included not only faculty and staff but also students of the Institute.

In August, the Bahá'í International Community appealed directly to the Iranian government, issuing an open letter to Kamran Daneshjoo, the Minister of Science, Research, and Technology.

That five-page letter recounted the long history of government oppression aimed at young Bahá'ís seeking a university education. At its heart, the letter asked this question:

"Why is the government so ruthless in the face of the earnestness of Bahá'í youth to obtain higher education?"

The letter noted that the government has made it official policy since 1991 to "block" the "progress and development" of the entire Bahá'í community — including by expelling young Bahá'ís from universities should they manage to enroll — something that has happened to hundreds of Bahá'ís over the years.

It also described efforts in the latter part of the last decade to prevent Bahá'ís from enrolling through a series of deceptive tactics that offered Bahá'ís a chance to take the national university entrance examination, only to later list their results as "incomplete," thus preventing enrollment.

"And now a fresh measure of tribulation has befallen the Bahá'ís, as they are subjected to harsh treatment in interrogations about their involvement with their informal efforts for the

education of youth," said the letter to Minister Daneshjoo.

"Individuals who assist with the educational program are threatened with imprisonment. Parents who host classes are notified that their homes will be expropriated if the classes continue. And students are warned against attending their classes and are instructed that they will never obtain a higher education so long as they do not abandon their faith and declare themselves to be Muslims.

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**"Individuals who assist with the educational program are threatened with imprisonment. Parents who host classes are notified that their homes will be expropriated if the classes continue. And students are warned against attending their classes and are instructed that they will never obtain a higher education so long as they do not abandon their faith and declare themselves to be Muslims.**

— Bahá'í International Community

"Yet, when the representatives of your government are confronted with these facts in the international arena, they continue to maintain that no one is deprived of education in Iran on account of his or her religion. How regrettable that the representatives of the Islamic Republic repeatedly peddle such obvious falsehoods, further undermining your government's credibility.

"When will the officials in Iran bring to an end the entrenched practice of saying one thing to Bahá'ís while offering a range of conflicting

reassurances on the global stage?” said the letter.

## International reaction

And, indeed, the reaction on the “global stage” has been rapid. Numerous governments and non-governmental organizations have issued expressions of concern since the renewed crackdown on BIHE in an outcry that has spanned the world, from Australia to Zambia.

In the United States, on 24 May, Senator Mark Kirk issued a strong condemnation of the BIHE arrests, calling for immediate action. “The Iranian dictators should not be allowed to trample their citizens’ basic human rights. I pledge to redouble our efforts in the Senate on behalf of the Iranian Bahá’í community and all citizens of Iran who yearn for human rights, freedom and democracy.”

In Austria, on 1 June, Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger described the restriction of access to education for young Bahá’ís as “unacceptable.”

In Brazil, on 2 June, Congressman Luiz Couto, former president of Brazil’s Human Rights and Minorities Commission, told the Brazilian National Congress, “The action of the authorities towards individuals associated with the BIHE demonstrate the clear intention of Iranian government to carry out their policy of the elimination of the Bahá’í community.”

In Germany, on 9 June, Christoph Strasser, Member of Parliament and spokesperson on human rights of the Social Democrats, addressed a letter of protest to the Iranian ambassador to Germany. “All humans have the right to education,” wrote Mr. Strasser. “With Bahá’ís being prohibited from studying at universities, your government is injuring fundamental human rights.”

In the United Kingdom, professors from Oxford, Cambridge and other leading universities in England wrote an open letter on 11 June, calling for academics, students and politicians to support the right of Bahá’ís to access higher education in Iran. “The



Seven Bahá’í educators who are being held in prison in connection with their involvement in an informal community program to provide higher education for young Bahá’ís. They are (top row, left to right): Mahmoud Badavam, Ramin Zibaie, Riaz Sobhani, Farhad Sedghi; (bottom row, left to right) Noushin Khadem, Kamran Mortezaie, and Vahid Mahmoudi.

authorities must be taught that human rights are universal,” they wrote to The Guardian newspaper. “Barring Bahá’ís from university exposes the government’s own ignorance.”

In Chile, on 15 June, the Senate unanimously asked President Sebastian Pinera to “strongly condemn” Iran for its “rigorous and systematic persecution of Bahá’ís.” The resolution specifically objected to the “unjust detention” of BIHE faculty and staff.

In Canada, on 21 June, Senator Mobina Jaffer — the first Muslim woman appointed to Canada’s upper house — informed the Senate that the attacks are “not only on the students and the faculty of the Bahá’í education institute, but on the cherished idea that education is the birthright of all.”

In Australia, on 28 June, Universities Australia — representing all 39 of the country’s universities — raised the issue with the Director-General of UNESCO. “Australian universities are united in their strong support for facilitating access to education for all, irrespective of religious faith,” the organization wrote.

In India, some 80 prominent citizens signed a petition to the Iranian Government calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the

prisoners. “The consequences of this policy of disallowing the Bahá’í youth to have access to higher education will be detrimental not only for the Bahá’í community of Iran, but also for the nation as a whole,” they wrote.

And in Zambia, students at the University of Zambia in June launched a two-week long postcard campaign “in support of BIHE and the right to education.” The postcard depicted Zambian students on one side and, on the other, a message for Iran’s minister of science, research and technology stating “Bahá’ís should be able to enter universities as faculty and staff and as students who can get a degree.”

*For updates on the situation of Bahá’ís in Iran, go to <http://news.bahai.org>*

# Four new staff members at Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office

**N**EW YORK — Four people have joined the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community in recent months.

## Ming Hwee Chong

Ming Hwee Chong joined the office as a representative to the United Nations in May 2011. Previously, he worked at several companies in Singapore specializing in mobile communications technologies. He also served on the national governing council of the Bahá'ís of Singapore, and was the community's director of Diplomatic Affairs.



Born in Singapore, Mr. Chong, 32, holds a Bachelors degree in Computing from the National University of Singapore. While at NUS, he also completed an 18-month overseas entrepreneurial internship program with Stanford University.

Mr. Chong has also served as a facilitator for inter-faith/inter-ethnic dialogues in Singapore and undertook service projects in Cambodia and Timor Leste.

## May Akale

May Akale joined the United Nations Office in February 2011 as an Alternate Representative, working mainly in the areas of social development, sustainable development, and the equality of women and men. Prior to this, Ms. Akale served as a consultant to the Office. In 2010, Ms. Akale was a Fellow at the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and followed



issues related to gender, climate change, and governance.

Her experience as an independent consultant has included developing strategies for community-based initiatives in Liberia and the United States. In the United States she also co-founded an NGO to address the concerns of immigrant and refugee women from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Ms. Akale, 33, grew up in Cameroon and holds a Masters degree in International Relations from Webster University and a Bachelors degree in Management from Minnesota State University.

## Daniel Perell

Daniel Perell, 29, joined the Bahá'í International Community's New York Office as an Alternate Representative in February 2011. His work focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on human rights.

Born in the United States, Mr. Perell holds a *Juris Doctor* from the University of Virginia School of Law and a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Prior to joining the Office, Mr. Perell worked with the International Service for Human Rights in Geneva, monitoring and reporting on human rights treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council. He also worked with



the United Nations on ex-combatant reintegration and medium-term governmental planning in Aceh, Indonesia.

Most recently, Mr. Perell conducted field research in Cairo on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Egypt.

## Simin Fahandejsadi

Simin Fahandejsadi joined the Bahá'í International Community's Office in Geneva in January 2011 as a Human Rights Officer.

Born in Iran, Ms. Fahandejsadi, 25, was educated in Canada. She holds a combined honors degree in Journalism and Political Science from the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. During and after college, she worked as a journalist at several broadcast news outlets, including as an intern at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Her work for the Geneva office will focus primarily on human



rights, although Ms. Fahandejsadi has also served as a Bahá'í International Community delegate to the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She also served as editor-in-chief on the International Youth Council's newsletter in connection with the 7th Annual Youth Assembly at the United Nations.

## Review: *Materialism*

*Materialism*, continued from page 16

University in Montreal and has published over 130 peer-reviewed articles.

Dr. Ghaderian is also a member of the Bahá'í community of Canada — and one of his primary interests is the intersection of spirituality and medicine.

In *Materialism*, his analysis draws extensively on ideas and quotations from the world's holy scriptures, which all teach of humanity's dual nature. "The purpose of religion and divine education is to enable spiritual qualities to dominate the material or lower qualities," he writes.

He suggests, moreover, that the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith today offer a distinctive antidote to the scourge of excessive materialism, appropriate for the modern mind, on a global level.

"Materialism in moral terms," he writes, "can have destructive consequences and may permeate society as a form of social dysfunction. It is an acquired condition and state of mind which develops as a result of a number of factors, including materialistic education, parental attitudes, and socio-cultural influences. To remedy this condition, a reconstruction of society's mindset and attitude toward the accumulation of wealth and greedy attachment to it is needed, through a consciousness of and belief in intrinsic moral values and the spiritual reality of existence which transcend dependence on material wealth as a lifestyle.

"The Bahá'í Faith defines economy in a broad context, relating it to the spiritual reality of human beings," he writes. "When we look at human society as a collection of souls in a global community, with equal rights to betterment and progress, we become more conscious of the needs of others. Through this perception we realize that the interests of society must transcend the pursuit of individual self-interest."



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# A moral philosophy with devastating results

## *Materialism: Moral and Social Consequences*

— By Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian  
George Ronald Publishers  
Oxford

### IN BRIEF

- A McGill University psychiatrist, Dr. Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian traces how the philosophy of materialism has infected our global culture
- By disregarding humanity's spiritual nature, materialism is shown to underlie numerous problems, from environmental degradation to poverty and human trafficking
- Drawing on religious scripture Dr. Ghadirian, offers a road map away from materialism and its excesses

It is a question many people in affluent countries have increasingly come to ask: why has not the steady rise of material wealth and comfort been accompanied by a similar increase in happiness and well-being? In fact, happiness has often declined in the face of wealth.

The divergent phenomenon has been documented in numerous studies, notes Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian in his new book, *Materialism: Moral and Social Consequences*. One researcher, he writes, found that the number of Americans who reported themselves “very happy” declined between 1957 and 1998 despite a doubling of income.

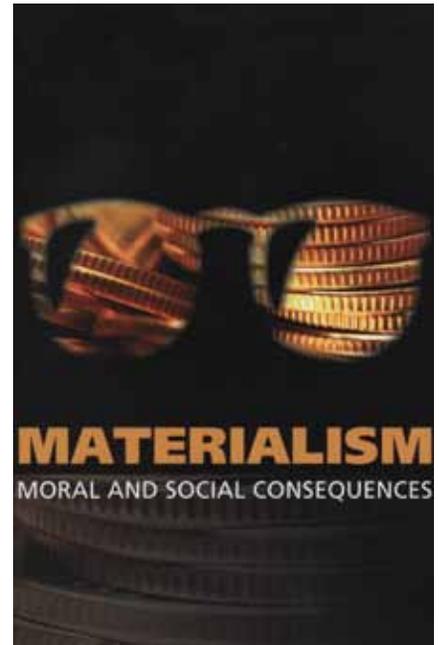
“This negative relationship between wealth and well-being is replicated in studies covering diverse cultures — in Australia, Germany, Norway, Romania, Russia, South Korea and the United Kingdom,” writes Dr. Ghadirian.

The explanation, says Dr. Ghadirian, lies in the false assumptions about the nature of reality, promulgated by what has become the prevailing philosophy and a “universal behavior pattern” in the modern world: materialism.

“Materialism’ is an expression given to a group of doctrines about the nature of the world in which matter is given a primary position while the mind (or spirit) is accorded a secondary or dependent reality or no consideration at all,” writes Dr. Ghadirian.

This reductionist idea today pervades almost nearly every school of science, which holds it as the path to progress and well-being. It has, moreover, been given popular expression by our consumer culture, in which “material desires are overrated and excessively glamorized.”

Dr. Ghadirian believes, however, that materialism is actually the thread



that today connects a wide range of problems, from environmental degradation to global extremes of wealth and poverty; from substance abuse to human trafficking.

The problem, he writes, is that materialism ignores the two-fold aspect of human nature: that we have both a body and a mind (or spirit). “The human mind is very complex; it cannot be broken down and reduced to a simple mechanism of brain function.”

As a result, we have ignored the importance of the spiritual dimension of human existence. Those held under materialism’s sway, therefore, are forever chasing the chimera of unceasing acquisition, unable to find true contentment and well-being.

Dr. Ghadirian is well qualified to write about such issues. A Fellow to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, he is a member of the faculty at McGill

*Materialism, continued on page 15*