

Combating Racism

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The Baha'i- International Community is pleased to participate in this Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. We are convinced that the elimination of racial discrimination and racial prejudice is one of the most pressing imperatives of our time, and that the international community must now take concrete steps to address urgently, forthrightly and wholeheartedly the global problem of racial discrimination. Motivated by these convictions, it is our purpose in this statement to outline the Baha'i- view of racial discrimination and racial equality, to summarize the manifold steps already being undertaken by Baha'i-s around the world to eliminate racial discrimination, and finally, to propose a practical programme for the elimination of racial discrimination that governments can now adopt and implement.

The Principle of Racial Unity

The principles of racial equality and racial unity are central to the Baha'i- teachings. Baha'i-s are working to establish a world civilization, guided by the underlying principles of the oneness of mankind and of the attainment of unity in diversity. On the one hand, these principles imply a recognition of the value and worth of each human being and of his contribution to society, regardless of his race, colour or ethnic or cultural background. Baha'i-s regard every human being as equal in the eyes of God. In consequence of this belief, Baha'i-s recognize the equality of all races and strive to eliminate all forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. Baha'i-s believe that: to discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh ... If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favour of, the minority, be it racial or otherwise. (Baha'i- Writings)

The principles of the oneness of mankind and of unity in diversity necessitate, on the other hand, an emphasis on developing unity among human beings of all races, colours and ethnic origins. The Baha'i- Writings counsel:

"Close your eyes to racial differences and welcome all with the light of oneness."

Because Baha'i-s attach such a great importance to encouraging unity, each Baha'i-, while taking pride in his unique racial, ethnic or cultural heritage, seeks above all to recognize and foster the common human and spiritual bonds that unite the human family -- a family rich in the diversity of races and cultures that compose it.

Baha'i- Efforts to Promote Racial Unity

Throughout the world, Baha'i-s and Baha'i- communities are striving to put these principles into practice. In classes conducted by Baha'i- communities in over 100 countries, children are being instructed in the principles of racial unity and equality and become aware of the problems of racial prejudice and discrimination. Baha'i- communities world-wide have co-operated with United Nations programmes in the field of eradicating racial discrimination. They have participated in human rights conferences and seminars, and have actively sponsored commemorations of Human Rights Day and Race Unity Day in their individual localities.

The everyday principles by which Baha'i-s and Baha'i- communities conduct their lives offer further testimony to the deep commitment felt by Baha'i-s to the principle of racial unity. In Baha'i- communities at the local and national levels, individuals of all races associate regularly and freely, in complete amity and concord. In Baha'i- elections, there is no campaigning and each Baha'i- is exhorted to vote by secret ballot for the individuals best qualified, without regard to race; as a consequence, the governing bodies of Baha'i- communities manifest a diverse racial composition. Furthermore, the Baha'i- principle of consultation ensures that each individual's voice is heard and is seriously considered. Finally, the varied racial and cultural composition of the Baha'i- International Community -- including representatives of many indigenous populations -- testifies to the practical realization of the principle of racial equality and unity within the world-wide Baha'i- community. Today, more than 2,000 tribes and ethnic groups are represented in over 100,000 local Baha'i- communities in the 165 independent countries in which Baha'i-s reside.

In short, Baha'i-s have made long strides towards the goal, enunciated in the 1973 Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, of promoting "human rights and fundamental freedom for all, without distinction of any kind on grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, especially by eradicating racial prejudice, racism and racial discrimination..." They have, moreover, contributed to that "vigorous campaign of information designed to dispel racial prejudice" called for at the beginning of the Decade.

The Importance of Spiritual Education

All the numerous Baha'i- activities in favour of racial equality and unity are manifestations of one fundamental goal: the promotion of racial unity through the elimination of racial prejudice. Baha'i-s recognize that racial discrimination can be eliminated only by abolishing racial prejudice, and moreover, by abolishing prejudice at its source: the human heart. Prejudice, Baha'i-s believe, is a spiritual problem, and consequently requires a spiritual solution. Prejudice can be eradicated only through a spiritual awakening -- an awakening nurtured, on the one hand, by the independent investigation of truth, and, on the other, by proper guidance and direction. What is necessary, then, to eliminate racial prejudice is proper spiritual education -- education whose purpose is to promote that spirit of free inquiry

which alone can break through racial stereotypes, while at the same time inculcating in human hearts and minds the fundamental principle -- and truth -- of the organic oneness of mankind. This spiritual education must begin from the earliest formative years of the child's personality, before the start of formal schooling; moreover, the development of a spiritual awareness must be fostered outside the classroom -- in the family, the home and the community.

A Model Curriculum on the Oneness of Mankind

The Baha'i- International Community believes that an important first step towards the establishment of universal spiritual education would be the elaboration and implementation in individual countries of a universal, yet culturally adaptable, curriculum on the organic oneness of mankind. This curriculum must be inspired by a recognition that racial prejudice will not be eliminated solely by studying the problem of racial discrimination; rather, the eradication of racial prejudice requires the development at an early age of a consciousness of the basic human and spiritual bonds uniting peoples of different races, colours and ethnic origins. What renders such a curriculum practical is the fact that these bonds are not merely ideal; they are real, and the latest knowledge that the biological, social, anthropological, economic and political sciences have to offer in testimony to the reality of human oneness and interdependence can be brought to bear in this curriculum.

Specifically, we propose that this model curriculum include study of:

the biological unity of the human race as one human species, with differences in physical and intellectual characteristics among the races having been produced by evolutionary, historical and environmental factors, all races possessing the same fundamental human biological characteristics and the same inherent capacities for intellectual achievement;

the basic human needs, desires and emotions shared by all human beings;

the universal quest by each individual for self-identity;

the universal institution of the family as the basic unit of society;

the universal need to belong to and participate in the life of a larger community, and to develop a sense of cultural identity;

the social, economic, cultural and political interdependence of all peoples; and

man's universal need and search for spiritual purpose through religion.

In the examination of each of these areas, cultural differences can be studied and appreciated as different expressions and manifestations of these same universal human characteristics and needs. In addition to these basic topics, the following subjects might also be included:

understanding how racial prejudice grows out of a failure to perceive the bonds uniting all peoples;

the importance of contact with people of other races as a means of breaking down prejudices and perceiving shared human bonds;

the different forms and manifestations of racial prejudice in our everyday lives; and

United Nations action in the field of human rights and the human rights standards already established by the United Nations.

The Baha'i- International Community believes that the development and implementation of a curriculum on the oneness of the human race, oriented towards the earliest stages of development of the child's personality, offers a realistic hope for the elimination of racial prejudice and for real progress towards the goals of the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, goals which must be revived and tackled with fresh spirit and a new determination. Based upon their principles and their accumulated experience in practically promoting racial unity, Baha'i-s are convinced that human attitudes can change; that, through a recognition of the organic oneness of peoples of all races and colours, racial prejudice and the attendant social ill of racial discrimination can be abolished. We express the sincere hope that this Conference will share in that optimism and determination.

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