

are called upon to assist in conserving the environment in ways that blend with their rhythm of life, and many undertake tree planting, organic gardening, and other practical environmental projects. The Bahá'í International Community maintains an Office of the Environment as part of its United Nations representation.

Material development is important to free us from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal struggling for existence. However, over a hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh

warned about the hazards to the planet of too much material civilization:

"If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation."

Bahá'ís see the world as evolving rapidly towards a global society as technology breaks down barriers between nations. The problems of the environment are symptoms of the larger imbalances in society, and the barriers to their solution are largely economic, social and political. Changes in behaviour, sacrifices of individual interests in the common good, and major social adjustments will be required. Even where solutions have been agreed, as at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the will to apply them has been lacking, and this lack of will is fundamentally a spiritual problem. Changed values and a restoration of moral and ethical principles are needed.

Society needs to be reorganized on a more organic pattern to reflect the diversity and decentralized nature of planetary environments. Local problems should be addressed at the local level, but with a sense of global responsibility. At the same time, the planetary scale of certain environmental problems escapes from the control of national governments. A rapid transition to a world society, with the establishment of the appropriate institutions of a world federation or commonwealth, will be necessary to address these global problems effectively. All humanity needs to recognize its oneness and develop a sense of world citizenship. The central aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to help to lay spiritual foundations for such a world civilization. As Bahá'u'lláh has said, we should become like the leaves of one tree, the flowers of one garden, the waves of one sea.

* The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Environment Programme.

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