

One Planet, One Habitation

A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World

A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community

June 2022

Main text formatted for study

The statement

The statement has a complex structure, with 44 paragraphs in the main text under eight headings, six separate boxes with text on special themes, and **Proposals for Exploration** under all except the first and last headings. There are also short quotations from the Bahá'í writings. Only the main text is included in this presentation.

Structure of the statement

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Humanity's existence is governed not only by physical forces, but also by social and moral laws of cause and effect. Greed is inherently corrosive to the common good, no matter how artfully justified or concealed. Acts of selfless compassion invariably hold the power to motivate and inspire, no matter how seemingly simple or isolated.

From this perspective, the path to a more harmonious relationship with nature cannot be one of technological adjustment alone. It must also involve communities and societies learning to align themselves with higher principles.

Unlocking the high-minded qualities latent in every individual has been a central concern of religious teachings and ideals for millennia. That fanaticism and sectarian dogmatism have undermined the moral and ethical

imperatives that lie at the heart of so many faith traditions can hardly be denied. Nevertheless, communities that are actively laboring to put transcendent values into practice, for the betterment of all, represent a reservoir of experience worthy of serious consideration.

"Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pagantry of wealth and riches," asserts Bahá'u'lláh, providing one example, among many, of an approach to personal identity and collective interaction that is grounded in values transcending material prosperity alone. How such ideals come to infuse the thinking and behavior of growing numbers, and how this process can be consciously fostered and accelerated, are questions of central importance to the environmental movement and to humanity as a whole.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Much remains to be learned about models of society that prioritize ethical principles and actively foster their development and application throughout a population. Establishing within each United Nations agency a focal point of learning about the practical application of moral and ethical principles, rather than simply seeking ready solutions, could generate knowledge about how advancement can be promoted across the full range of human experience.

A notable alternative to the paradigm of material advancement alone can be found in the significance that multitudes around the world place in the transcendence of the human spirit and its connection with the divine. Much could be learned from a systematic and scientific inquiry into communities that are learning to apply spiritual principles—such as selflessness, solidarity with others, and stewardship for the natural world—to advance broad-based social progress. In addition to various United Nations initiatives already focused on engagement with faith-based organizations, such an inquiry could explore alternative sources of motivation and inspiration, and the impact they can have on community and environmental well-being.



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SCIENCE AND RELIGION: COMPLEMENTARY SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

In working to build a more sustainable world, humanity has at its disposal two mutually reinforcing systems of knowledge and practice: science and religion.

Scientific inquiry has been a vital instrument in seeking to understand physical reality and in forging innovative solutions based on a search for truth and a commitment to learning. When combined with values such as freedom from prejudice and bias, it has enabled humanity to separate fact from conjecture. Scientific capabilities—of observing, measuring, rigorously testing ideas—have allowed us to construct a coherent understanding of the laws and processes governing physical reality, as well as to gain insights into human conduct and the working of society. Far from being the province of researchers and

academics alone, the methodologies of scientific inquiry are tools that any individual or community can employ.

For its part, religion provides a framework by which high ideals can be applied to individual lives and to the life of society, for the betterment of all. The spiritual principles animating the world's enduring religions have aided individuals and entire populations to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and the nature of the good life and the good society. When true to these ideals, religion has provided a bulwark against ideologies of materialism that would reduce human beings to mere resources to be exploited or consumers to be satiated. At its highest, religion has not only raised the call to virtues such as integrity, good character, high resolve, cooperation,

and sacrificial endeavor, but drawn growing numbers together around such principles, unifying disparate elements, and giving rise to cohesive communities working to manifest high ideals in practice.

Taken together, science and religion provide fundamental organizing principles by which lasting progress can be made. When both the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity are kept in mind, and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce human progress to the consumption of goods, services, and technological packages is avoided. Both science and religion are essential to the liberation of individuals and communities from the traps of ignorance and passivity. Both are vital to the advancement of civilization.



"Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress."

— Bahá'í holy writings

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The brochure has a beautiful layout with photographs

One Homeland

*This span of earth is but one homeland
and one habitation.*

*It behooveth you to abandon vainglory
which causeth alienation
and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony*

— Bahá'u'lláh

The Natural World

The natural world, in all its wonder and majesty, offers profound insight into the essence of interdependence.

From the biosphere as a whole to the smallest microorganism, it demonstrates how dependent any one life-form is on numerous others—and how imbalances in one system reverberate across an interconnected whole.

(One Planet – One Habitation §1)

The Natural World

Intimately embedded in this greater system, and deeply reliant upon it, humanity faces a paradox growing more consequential by the day.

On the one hand, the human race has never held more power to shape the physical world on planetary scales—a development some have termed the anthropocene.

This is a testament to our collective ingenuity and creativity, as well as the boundless potential before us.

On the other, that very power, when untempered by thoughtful consideration and directed by priorities heedless of the present and future common good, gives rise to consequences not only worldwide in scope but potentially irreversible.

The Natural World

As the grave effects of surpassing planetary limits become increasingly apparent, from climate change to biodiversity loss to environmental degradation and pollution, humanity is being compelled to develop more mature, collaborative, and constructive relationships between its peoples and with the natural environment.

(One Planet – One Habitation §3)

The Natural World

Thinking on environmental issues has progressed markedly since the landmark United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972.

The advances achieved over the past half-century, whether scientific, legal, or institutional, stand as a reason for confidence and a source of hope for the future.

Yet, today, increases in understanding must be translated into action far more rapidly and on much wider scales.

The Natural World

Sweeping changes in the organization and operation of human affairs have become an existential imperative, necessary and unavoidable.

The question before the nations and leaders of the world is whether the needed action will be taken as a matter of conscious choice and prevention, or whether it will be prompted by the destruction and suffering wrought by escalating environmental breakdown.

(One Planet – One Habitation §4)

The need for a systems perspective

Our activities must reflect the fact that the wealth and wonders of the earth are the **common heritage** of all people, who deserve **just and equitable access** to its resources. Our choices must evince an intergenerational perspective in which the well-being of **future inhabitants** is taken into account at all levels of decision-making. And in this turbulent period of human history, our activities must increasingly be tempered by the **wisdom and judgment** that come with growing maturity. (Trusteeship)

Service to the common good

*Is there any deed in the world that
would be nobler than service to the
common good?*

... No, by the Lord God!

— Bahá'í holy writings

One people in one global homeland

From a perspective wide enough to encompass the planet in its entirety, humanity can be seen in no other light than as one people living in one global homeland. Consciousness of this oneness, expressed through relationships of justice, constitutes the only foundation on which sustainable societies can be raised.

(One Planet – One Habitation §5)

One people in one global homeland

Every people, in its own way, celebrates the ever-abundant beauty and grandeur of nature.

The traditions of every culture pay homage to that priceless heritage that sustains not only the physical needs of bodies but also the transcendent qualities of the spirit.

The task of building a sustainable and flourishing world holds the promise of providing a point of unity not only in shared endeavor, but in joyful celebration as well.

(One Planet – One Habitation §6)

One people in one global homeland

To acknowledge humanity's oneness is not to suppress variations of expression, culture, or social organization.

The principle of unity contains within it the essential concept of diversity; indeed, this is what distinguishes it from uniformity.

In the natural world, systems flourish through the interaction of highly diversified elements.

Differences between various components can enhance the functioning of the whole and strengthen the resilience of the overall system.

(One Planet – One Habitation §7)

One people in one global homeland

In human affairs, diversity of thought, background, and approach are similarly critical.

It is through the interaction of diverse perspectives and experiences that higher degrees of truth can be found and insight gained.

Otherwise, an overabundance of similar views and opinions, like excessive dependence on a single natural resource, leaves a system exposed to dangers and vulnerable to breakdown.

One people in one global homeland

The contributions of ever more populations, well coordinated and integrated, will be required to rebalance humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Presumptions of any one group's superiority over another, asserted along lines of nationality, race, wealth, or any other characteristic, cannot but erode the bonds needed to generate consensus and sustain coordinated action.

Feelings of otherness invariably undermine motivation to work for the common good, either social or ecological.

(One Planet – One Habitation §9)

One people in one global homeland

Humanity has often struggled to appreciate diversity while working to build unity, to respect and protect the particular while drawing on the strength of the shared. Stewardship of the natural world offers a powerful means to reconcile these interconnected ideals.

(One Planet – One Habitation §10)

Empowering protagonists...

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(based on One Planet – One Habitation §5)

New bases for human happiness

We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end.

— Bahá'í holy writings

Consensus in action

Moving humanity to a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with the natural world will require a strong and actionable consensus, along with collective will, around key principles that are to shape the affairs of the international community.

A level of agreement has been established around foundational principles such as stewardship, interdependence, and justice. But such ideals have yet to take hold as the accepted foundation for collective global action.

(One Planet – One Habitation §12)

Consensus in action

The insufficiency of national plans to reduce carbon emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement, to date, provides one well-noted example.

This gap between rhetoric and action is indicative of a deeper challenge, namely that principles related to sustainability are not embedded deeply enough in the collective consciousness to shape the choices and behaviors of nations.

Consensus in action

Consensus that has been well settled is demonstrated not merely by the name and claim of text on a page, but through coordinated, collaborative action; its touchstone is deeds, not words.

Strong commitment to key principles and values at the international level assists national and local leaders to overcome the barriers that inevitably arise in implementing necessary changes.

It clarifies the rationale for nations to provide one another with the resources necessary to bring agreements to life. And it helps societies move past objections based on limited or self-serving interests.

(One Planet – One Habitation §14)

Consensus in action

No longer can the peoples of the world be asked to tolerate the disjunction of agreements signed but left unimplemented.

Action must be made coherent with principles that are collectively embraced and championed by all.

The international order must be placed on a footing that effectively facilitates planetary responses to planetary challenges.

(One Planet – One Habitation §15)

Poverty shall disappear

The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, that everyone, as far as possible ... shall share in comfort and well-being.

— Bahá'í holy writings

Redefining progress

If humanity's relationship with the natural world is to be refashioned, notions of progress, civilization, and development will need to be redefined.

Efforts in this direction, such as budgets centered around well-being or indicators of progress more holistic than gross domestic product, must be expanded and deepened, and fundamental questions interrogated further.

What are the qualities by which a person, nation, or corporation are judged successful?

For what are they commended and appreciated?

(One Planet – One Habitation §17)

Redefining progress

So long as such questions are answered according to values that prioritize possessions over relationships or acquisition over responsibility, a sustainable world will remain out of reach.

Such values, by their very nature and effect on the human spirit, beckon incessantly to excess, exploitation, and depletion.

They also give rise to gross extremes of alienating wealth and debilitating poverty.

(One Planet – One Habitation §18)

Redefining progress

Only to the degree that these are set aside can the profound contradictions they give rise to—not least the expectation of infinite growth on a finite planet—be resolved.

And only as progress is understood in new terms can the fundamental drivers of present environmental crises be accurately identified and lasting change be made.

(One Planet – One Habitation §18)

Redefining progress

What should be plainly acknowledged is that no country has yet mastered the process of sustainable development.

Certain forms of industrialization, technological capacity, and macroeconomic growth have often been equated with development.

(One Planet – One Habitation §19)

Redefining progress

But the dissatisfaction and difficulties of multitudes living in areas traditionally considered developed, no less than the injustices facing numerous other populations around the world and the strain put on the natural world, demonstrate that such a vision is incomplete at best and often actively detrimental.

No one pattern of life and vision of society can be taken as the model toward which all humanity should aspire.

(One Planet – One Habitation §19)

Redefining progress

Crafting a more holistic conception of progress will require an expanded understanding of ourselves as a species, including truths about the human spirit itself. The planet, its peoples, and creatures have suffered tremendously from a materialistic mindset that views the individual as a purely self-interested economic unit, competing with others to accumulate an ever-greater share of the world's material resources.

(One Planet – One Habitation §20)

Redefining progress

This caricature has largely been rejected at the level of formal theory as simplistic and crude.

Many aspects of the global order still rest on these assumptions, however, and often reinforce and deepen them.

(One Planet – One Habitation §20)

Redefining progress

A more accurate understanding of human nature would encompass qualities and attitudes such as trustworthiness, mutual support, commitment to truth, and a sense of responsibility, that are the building blocks of a stable social order.

It would give rise to models which would avoid or ameliorate the ills of reductive materialism, ensuring that our pursuit of prosperity includes the many other facets of individual and collective well-being.

(One Planet – One Habitation §21)

Redefining progress

To redefine progress is not to dismiss any legitimate accomplishments of the past, but to expand the boundaries of achievements yet to come.

From new approaches to ownership and usership, to new forms of urban organization, to new methods of agriculture, power generation, and transportation, the possibilities before humanity are vast.

(One Planet – One Habitation §22)

Redefining progress

Seizing them will require a far fuller expression of the stores of human potential latent within every individual and the combined efforts of humanity as a whole.

But the coming decades hold the prospect of being an exceptionally rich and rewarding period of human history. Daunting as the unprecedented scale of transformation needed in numerous sectors of society might sometimes seem, it opens possibilities for a great flourishing of human creativity and initiative.

(One Planet – One Habitation §22)

Religion and Science

*Religion and science are the two wings
upon which man's intelligence
can soar into the heights,
with which the human soul can progress.*

— Bahá'í holy writings

Aligning with higher principles

Humanity's existence is governed not only by physical forces, but also by social and moral laws of cause and effect.

Greed is inherently corrosive to the common good, no matter how artfully justified or concealed.

Acts of selfless compassion invariably hold the power to motivate and inspire, no matter how seemingly simple or isolated.

(One Planet – One Habitation §24)

Aligning with higher principles

From this perspective, the path to a more harmonious relationship with nature cannot be one of technological adjustment alone.

It must also involve communities and societies learning to align themselves with higher principles.

(One Planet – One Habitation §25)

Aligning with higher principles

Unlocking the high-minded qualities latent in every individual has been a central concern of religious teachings and ideals for millennia.

That fanaticism and sectarian dogmatism have undermined the moral and ethical imperatives that lie at the heart of so many faith traditions can hardly be denied.

Nevertheless, communities that are actively laboring to put transcendent values into practice, for the betterment of all, represent a reservoir of experience worthy of serious consideration.

(One Planet – One Habitation §26)

Aligning with higher principles

“Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches,” asserts Bahá’u’lláh, providing one example, among many, of an approach to personal identity and collective interaction that is grounded in values transcending material prosperity alone.

How such ideals come to infuse the thinking and behavior of growing numbers, and how this process can be consciously fostered and accelerated, are questions of central importance to the environmental movement and to humanity as a whole.

(One Planet – One Habitation §27)

Justice as process and outcome

Central to any authentic conception of oneness at a planetary level are issues of justice.

That widespread suffering has resulted from humanity's extractive relationship with the natural world, that a select few benefit from excessive use of the earth's resources to the detriment of many others, that immediate preferences often override the basic needs of future generations—these reveal profound injustices to people and planet.

Justice as process and outcome

Correcting such ills will require an honest reckoning, along with creativity, perseverance, and humility in response.

The voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order will need to figure far more prominently into decision-making processes at all levels.

(One Planet – One Habitation §30)

Justice as process and outcome

Insight will need to be sought from populations sustaining more harmonious relationships with the natural world, many of whom live in areas other than urban centers. Diverse cultural understandings of humanity's relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples, can provide needed insights into the creation of more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

(One Planet – One Habitation §30)

Justice as process and outcome

Justice demands a wide range of outcomes—that the benefits of human civilization be distributed with equity, for example, or that responsibility for undertaking necessary transitions be apportioned in light of actors' historic contributions to the present climate crisis. But justice at the level of outcome is established only through the operation of justice at the level of process.

(One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At the individual level, justice calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments and equity in one's treatment of others.

At the group level, it is the practical expression of awareness that the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked.

It also requires a standard of truth-seeking far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize present-day relations—a process of consultation and decision-making that is principled, candid, and fact-based.

(One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At all levels, the capacity to manifest justice—and commitment to doing so—must be strengthened. Just and equitable relationships are indispensable foundations for any unified global movement for the common good.

(One Planet – One Habitation §32)

Knowledge for ascent

*Knowledge is as wings to man's life,
and a ladder for his ascent.
Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.*

— Bahá'í holy writings

Embracing the Role of the State

Numerous actors have a part to play in building a more sustainable world.

Local communities can do much to foster collective action and multiply the innovative capacities of their members.

Youth consistently demonstrate an openness to new ways of organizing society, a willingness to learn through front-line action, and a readiness to commit themselves to high endeavors and the well-being of future generations.

(One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

Business and industry, as linchpins of the contemporary economic order, can make constructive decisions whose benefits ripple through societies and landscapes across the globe.

The role of national government, however, is unique and preeminent today.

At this point in human history, the nation-state is one of the fundamental units of the global political order.

States therefore have an indispensable role in addressing transnational environmental challenges.

(One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

The mandate of the state, as steward of the common good, is long-term in nature, transcending electoral cycles and political terms. Effective governance ensures the flourishing of all within a jurisdiction, for generations to come.

The state also bears crucial responsibility for governing the commons, whether within its own borders or in collaboration with other institutions beyond them, for example in managing and caring for public goods that benefit all.

(One Planet – One Habitation §35)

Embracing the Role of the State

The full capacities of the state must be brought to bear on environmental challenges.

Remaking entire industries across various sectors of society is the work of decades, involving vast quantities of financial resources, jobs, and physical infrastructure. Vital, therefore, will be government's role in developing long-term plans, advancing them methodically over time, and creating the conditions in which necessary advances become feasible.

Embracing the Role of the State

In some cases this might take the form of subsidies, compensation, regulatory adjustments, or other means of incentivizing needed action.

At other times, the norm-setting role of government and individual leaders will be required—explaining, encouraging, praising, calling to action.

In all, institutions of governance are uniquely positioned to foster and sustain generational transition.

(One Planet – One Habitation §37)

Embracing the Role of the State

Establishing new qualities and attitudes toward leadership will be essential, if states are to effectively address environmental concerns.

Personal character is central in this regard and progress would be seen in leaders approaching public service as a responsibility and not a path to personal gain, demonstrating accountability to ends higher than electoral victory or personal advancement, and taking decisions that are difficult but aligned with the greater good.

Such instances of moral courage stand among leaders' most enduring achievements and will be remembered long after the calculations of any particular moment or political climate have faded.

(One Planet – One Habitation §38)

Embracing the Role of the State

Pessimism about the role of the state has grown in recent years, and it is true that many have suffered when governments have been unable or unwilling to fulfill their functions—when the role of establishing rules and standards has been surrendered to those with vested interests; when service provision has been privatized in ways that subordinate human well-being to the demands of the profit motive; when political corruption and expediency have sacrificed the common good to personal advantage.

Embracing the Role of the State

Yet such reflections are less an indictment of government itself than a reminder of the unique power it holds. Good governance allows the power of action to be unlocked at the level of individual initiative and to surge at the level of collective volition.

(One Planet – One Habitation §40)

Embracing the Role of the State

Good governance creates the context in which the private sector, the scientific community, civil society, and others can make their highest contributions. All, therefore, have an interest in ensuring that government executes, as fully as possible, its functions as promoter of the public trust.

(One Planet – One Habitation §40)

Oneness of Humanity

[The principle of the oneness of humanity] insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other.

— *Bahá'í holy writings*

(One Planet – One Habitation)

The world that beckons

A flourishing global civilization in harmony with the natural environment is a vision toward which growing numbers are laboring.

The world that beckons is one of integration and balance, beauty, and maturity.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §42)

The world that beckons

It is a world with a redefined sense of progress, filled with communities and individuals working together with the support of institutions toward the realization of their highest aspirations.

It is a world increasingly relieved of the destructive moral compromises—social, economic, and environmental—that have so often been asserted as necessary to progress.

(One Planet – One Habitation §42)

The world that beckons

Movement toward this vision has begun; its momentum is gathering.

Lofty ambitions have been articulated and action is being called for on scales unseen.

Yet the pace of transformation has not, so far, risen to the demands of the moment.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §43)

The world that beckons

The range of options available to make the adjustments necessary will only narrow if action is deferred to the future.

Will humanity act on the truth that its own destiny and that of the planet are irrevocably intertwined?

Or will still greater calamities be required to move it to action?

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §43)

The world that beckons

The gulf between intention and action is one of the central challenges facing humanity today.

This gap can be bridged; individuals, communities, and nations are contributing their share toward this goal every day.

Yet for action to rise to the scales required, far stronger consensus and collective will among the nations is needed around the values demanded by the current stage of humanity's development.

(One Planet – One Habitation §44)

The world that beckons

It also calls for much greater resolve in putting those values into practice, recommitting to that which is beneficial to the common good and discarding whatever stands in the way of answering the moral and practical call of the present hour.

This is a high endeavor indeed, and its benefits a priceless legacy that must be left to the generations to come. Let us join together in rising to its demands.

(One Planet – One Habitation §44)

Source

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