

One Planet, One Habitation

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

1 June 2022

A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community

Main themes in simplified language

*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

A habitation is a home, a place where we live, and we all live in the same place, our planet homeland.

The Natural World

1. The natural world, in all its wonder, shows us the meaning 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 affect the interconnected whole.

2. Humanity is dependent on this greater system, but while the human race has never had more power to shape the physical world on planetary scales, this very power, when not considered carefully and ignoring the present and future common good, is having worldwide and potentially irreversible consequences.

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

4. Today we need action far more rapidly and on much wider scales, changing the organization and operation of human affairs. 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 caused by destruction and suffering from environmental breakdown.

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

5. Seen from the whole planet, humanity is one people living in one global homeland. Consciousness of this oneness, applying justice, is the only foundation on which sustainable societies can be raised.

6. Every people, in its own way, celebrates the beauty and abundance of nature. The traditions of every culture recognize this priceless heritage that sustains our physical and spiritual needs. Building a sustainable world will bring unity both in shared effort and joyful celebration.

7. Humanity's oneness includes variations of expression, culture, or social organization, which we call unity in diversity. In the natural world, systems also depend on many species to function and be resilient.

8. In human affairs, diversity of thought, background, and approach are similarly important. Truth comes through the interaction of diverse perspectives and experiences. Too many similar views and opinions can lead to dangers and breakdown.

9. The contributions of many more peoples are needed to rebalance our relationship with the natural world. Presuming that one group is superior to another, along lines of nationality, race, wealth, or any other characteristic, prevents consensus and coordinated action, and undermines motivation to work for the common good, either social or ecological.

*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

12. Moving humanity to a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with the natural world will require strong agreement and collective will around key principles for the affairs of the international community such as stewardship, interdependence, and justice.

13. The gap between words and actions shows that principles related to sustainability do not yet shape the choices and behaviors of nations.

14. We need deeds, not words. Commitment to key principles and values can help societies move past limited or self-serving interests.

15. Action must be made coherent with principles that are collectively embraced and championed by all. The international order must facilitate planetary responses to planetary challenges.

Redefining progress

17. To fix humanity's relationship with the natural world, we need to redefine ideas of progress, civilization, and development. What are the qualities by which a person, nation, or corporation are judged successful? For what are they commended and appreciated?

18. So long as our values prioritize possessions over relationships or acquisition over responsibility, and we expect infinite growth on a finite planet, a sustainable world will remain out of reach. Such values affect the human spirit, leading to excess, exploitation, and depletion, with extremes of wealth and poverty. Progress must be understood in new terms.

19. No country is an example of sustainable development. We thought development was industrialization, technological capacity, and macroeconomic growth, but these leave many dissatisfied and in difficulty, while injustices face numerous other populations around the world. No one pattern of life and vision of society can be taken as the model for all of humanity.

*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

20. Redefining progress requires an expanded understanding of ourselves as a species, including truths about the human spirit itself. The simplistic materialistic assumption 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, still underlies the global order.

21. A more accurate understanding of human nature would include qualities such as trustworthiness, mutual support, commitment to truth, and a sense of responsibility, that are the building blocks of a stable social order, ensuring that our pursuit of prosperity includes the many other aspects of individual and collective well-being.

22. Redefining progress could include new approaches to ownership and usership, new forms of urban organization, new methods of agriculture, power generation, and transportation, with vast possibilities before humanity.

Aligning with higher principles

24. 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.

25. The path to a more harmonious relationship with nature, beyond technological adjustment, must involve communities and societies learning to live by higher principles.

26. Religious teachings can unlock the high-minded qualities latent in every individual, creating communities that are actively putting transcendent values into practice for the betterment of all.

27. “Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches,” says Bahá’u’lláh, an example of values transcending material prosperity alone that can help the environmental movement and humanity as a whole.

*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

Justice as process and outcome

29. Justice is central to oneness at a planetary level. There are profound injustices to people and planet in the widespread suffering resulting from humanity’s extractive relationship with the natural world, when a select few benefit from excessive use of the earth’s resources while hurting many others, when immediate desires take away from the basic needs of future generations.

30. Correcting such ills will require honesty, creativity, perseverance, and humility. Decision-making must include the voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order, drawing on insights of populations and indigenous peoples living in harmony with the natural world, and creating more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

31. Justice demands that the benefits of human civilization be distributed with equity, and that responsibility for undertaking necessary transitions reflect historic contributions to the present climate crisis. We also need just processes. 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 awareness that the interests of the individual and those of society are closely linked. It also requires seeking truth far beyond present patterns of negotiation and compromise, using a process of consultation and decision-making that is principled, open, and fact-based.

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

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

The world that calls us

34. Everyone can play a part in building a more sustainable world. Local communities can do much for collective action using 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.

42. A flourishing global civilization in harmony with the natural environment is our vision. This world is one of integration and balance, beauty, and maturity. 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 hopes. It is a world without the destructive moral compromises—social, economic, and environmental—too often seen as necessary to progress.

43. Movement toward this vision has begun, with high ambitions and calls for action. Yet the transformation is too slow. The longer we wait, the harder it will be. Will humanity act on the truth that its own destiny and that of the planet are irrevocably linked? Or will still greater calamities be required to move it to action?

44. The gulf between words and action is a central challenge. Yet far stronger consensus and collective will among the nations is needed around the values demanded by the current stage of humanity's development, putting those values into practice for the common good and discarding whatever stands in the way. This is a high endeavor indeed, to leave a priceless legacy for future generations. Let us join together in rising to its demands.