

TAKE NO PRIDE IN GOLD AND SILVER:

*A relationship lens on financing
for development*



*The Statement of the Bahá'í International Community
on the occasion of the Third International Conference on
Financing for Development*

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The Third International Conference on Financing for Development is occurring at a time when the nations of the world are focusing efforts to mobilize the resources and secure the commitments needed for the realization of the UN post-2015 Development Agenda. In the second half of this year, three major summits—in Addis Ababa, in New York, and in Paris—will seek to crystallize a collective vision of sustainable development and the means for its implementation. The Bahá'í International Community is heartened that the draft Addis Ababa Accord acknowledges that among the means of creating a sustainable and equitable society will be “unlocking the transformative potential of people”¹ themselves—critical and often overlooked agents of change. Indeed, unless the focal point of sustainability is located within communities, no amount of external resources will lead to success.

Today, the global framework for financing for development is much more holistic in its outlook, evidenced in particular by its recognition of human dimensions of financing mechanisms, processes, and institutions. The Bahá'í International Community notes the significant progress in the discourse on financing for development since the first and second International Conferences, held in Monterrey and Doha respectively, especially in giving attention to the pivotal role and needs of women and girls, the emphasis on human rights, the centrality of employment, the promise and challenge of migration, and the roles assigned to people as the agents of development. The draft declaration for the Post-2015 Development Agenda states “this is an agenda by and for the people—and this, we believe, will ensure its success.”²

¹ “[The Addis Ababa Accord of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development].” 21 June 2015 Draft.

² “Transforming our World by 2030: A New Agenda for Global Action.” Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda. 2 June 2015.

It has been widely acknowledged in the drafts of the Addis Ababa Accord that financial resources on their own will not bring about a more equitable and peaceful global order. Intimately connected will be the integrity and stability of governing institutions and elected public officials, peaceful and cohesive societies, as well as a sense of agency and responsibility, which can bend human energies and talents toward the betterment of society. In brief, it is through the lens of human relationships—that bind us as individuals, communities, and nations—that we can understand the nature of imbalances and injustices holding back human development.

Under current conditions, the majority of the world's people live in societies in which relationships of dominance prevail—domination of one nation, one race, one tribe, one social class, one religious group, or one sex over another. Within such a framework, financing for development has the

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potential to either entrench relationships of power and domination or transform them into those of mutuality and cooperation. It can contribute to development to the extent that it facilitates a process of empowering all people to make their rightful contribution to the advancement of society. Development, therefore, can no longer be viewed as

something that one group of people does for the benefit of another. The equitable and effective allocation of resources³ enables even the materially prosperous to benefit from the as-yet-unrealized contributions of the materially poor. The relationship can no longer be one of donor-recipient—with its attendant risks of creating cultures of paternalism and dependency—but must mature to one of assisting all to be protagonists of

³ For example, in 2013, 2.4% of global GDP—representing 1.75 trillion USD—was allocated to military expenditures, yet the 0.7% commitment to ODA, first made in 1970 and reinforced in Monterrey and Doha, remains aspirational. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (April 2014). *SIPRI Fact Sheet - Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2013*. Retrieved from <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1404.pdf>

development. Such a shift in perspective, we believe, is among the key catalysts of the transformation needed to realize the post-2015 development agenda.

The duty of elected representatives to the body politic is a key dimension to be addressed by the Financing for Development agenda. The degree of complexity multiplies when considering the tremendous potential and risk associated with private public partnerships, competing financial and personal interests, and the growing demands placed on those in positions of power. The issue is often framed in terms of transparency and accountability, beneficial ideals in their own right. Yet, in addition to these critical issues, we must ask: What is needed for governing institutions to foster and direct the potentialities, the good will, the energies of the world's people towards the creation of a more equitable and prosperous social order? What principles should govern the exercise of authority in an age of growing interdependence, coupled with growing inequality, as well as suspicion and distrust of those in positions of power?

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It is imperative, the Bahá'í International Community believes, that those in authority exert their utmost energies to win the confidence and genuine support of those they seek to govern; that they deliberate openly and to the fullest extent possible with those affected by the decisions they take; that they assess the highest aspirations of the communities they serve; and, perhaps most importantly, that they foster unity and solidarity. With over a hundred commitments in the Addis Ababa Accord, representing sweeping issues related to finance, the eyes of the world will be on the sincerity and determination of elected leaders and governing institutions to fulfill the mandate they are creating. Furthermore, a powerful signal of

commitment at all levels of governance will be the actions of elected leaders, who, in the face of limited resources and competing needs, do not seek to enrich themselves at the expense of their people. Enlightened leaders are thus extolled in the Bahá'í Writings: “To them, if every individual citizen has affluence and ease, the royal coffers are full. They take no pride in gold and silver, but rather in their enlightenment and their determination to achieve the universal good.”

The Bahá'í International Community believes that development efforts will only be transformative and sustainable if change occurs at the level of culture—in the ethical, moral and spiritual domain of individual and

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collective life. What people at all levels of society *choose to do* is as important as what they are able to do, and that decision is more profound than finance alone. Development, after all, is not only about the capacity to achieve certain goals, but also about the values that

motivate individuals to choose constructive, and often the more challenging, but more productive, course of action. We feel strongly that the absence of concepts such as ethics, values⁴, trust, duty, honesty, and justice⁵ from the Addis Ababa Accord robs the discourse of a critical dimension. Are these not the capacities that, when present in individuals, in communities, and in private and public institutions, will prompt action to advance the well-being of society as a whole and guard against narrow agendas that undermine efforts towards sustainability and peace?

Conventional measures and assessments, while valuable, are capable of conveying only a narrow snapshot of individual and social well-being. In the final analysis, the measurement of poverty and prosperity—in all their

⁴ This term appears once: “We also reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as well as the universal values expressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.”

⁵ This word appears once, in the context of justice systems.

respective dimensions—can best be determined by those who are most directly affected. Without a way to identify and track those less tangible yet essential elements of prosperity, our development efforts will continue to be dictated primarily by material considerations while transformational and lasting change will remain out of reach. Going forward, the Bahá'í International Community urges all those involved in these deliberations to give earnest consideration to the equally important, yet difficult-to-measure dimensions that pertain to ethical, moral, and spiritual qualities—in short, the integrity and the very foundation—of our collective enterprise.