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...Baha'i Inspired Perspectives

## **Advancement of Women and Girls Featured at Major Forum on Development**

Eight thousand people gathered earlier this month for a major forum focused on the theme: “Women and girls at the forefront of sustainable development.”



*Vice President of the European Parliament Heidi Hautala addresses the audience at the BIC session on 5 June 2018.*

The occasion was the European Commission’s annual event, [European Development Days](#), which was held on 5 and 6 June in Brussels. Among the many participants, which included non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups, were heads of government, members of royal families, and European officials.

“The advancement of women is not simply about women occupying the same positions as men in our current society or opening room for women to participate within the existing social structures,” said [Baha’i](#) International Community (BIC) representative Rachel Bayani in her remarks at a session organized by the BIC Brussels Office on the first day.

“We need new structures and relationships, conceptualized and shaped by women and men together, responding to the needs of an increasingly global and interconnected society,” she continued.

The session, held on 5 June, focused on the education of the girl-child, a subject that the BIC has addressed for many decades and which is rooted in the teachings of [Baha’u’llah](#):

Therefore, surely, God is not pleased that so important an instrument as woman should suffer from want of training in order to attain the perfections desirable and necessary for her great life’s work! Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven. Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all!

Woman must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man’s equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment. – [Abdu’l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 161.](#)



*A member of the audience looks on at the BIC event.*

Another teaching of Baha'u'llah is relative to the equality of men and women. In the human family of God there is no distinction. God is no respecter of gender. The religion of God is one. The human family share in common all the faculties; they share in common all the divine bounties. God has not accredited any difference between the male and the female. The same education must be given to women as to men, so that they may acquire science and arts, so that they may advance along the course of civilization, in order that they may become proficient and attain to the level of men.

In the Orient women have been very degraded in the past, men giving no importance to them, thinking that men were created superior, but through the teaching of Baha'u'llah who declared that a great calling is destined for women, they promoted the facilities for the education and training of the girls. In a brief space of time the girls and the women alike have advanced along the pathway of education. Now, in the country of Persia alone, many schools have been organized for the girls, and girls are engaged in the study of the sciences and arts. – [Abdu'l-Baha](#), *Star of the West*, Volume 2, p. 8.

The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfil this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. – [The Universal House of Justice](#), Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 689.

Vice President of the European Parliament Heidi Hautala, who addressed the BIC event, emphasized the critical importance of ensuring education for girls in social and economic development efforts.

At the session, the BIC screened [Mercy's Blessing](#), an award-winning film about the education of girls.

The conference, which closed Wednesday, covered a wide range of topics relating to women's empowerment and the protection of women's rights in the context of social and economic development.

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