

A Basis for Collective Action on Climate

BAHA'I WORLD NEWS SERVICE



[This article, the second part of a statement called *Shared Vision, Shared Volition: Choosing Our Global Future Together*, comes from the Baha'i International Community, and is addressed to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France. Quotes from the Baha'i teachings have been added.]

Action on issues of sustainability is often grounded in the sentiment that we all live on the same planet. Of course shared concerns such as climate change, transnational migration, and global pandemics are not to be discounted. But truly transforming individual and collective patterns of life will require a much deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of the planetary biosphere. People and the environment are inter-connected aspects of one organically integrated system. At this point in history, neither can be accurately understood in isolation from the other. Implicit in this understanding is the organic oneness of the human race itself. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people has numerous implications for the formulation of effective action at all levels. COP 21, for example, can be understood as an opportunity to embrace more deeply the practical implications of the oneness of humanity, including the obligation to translate our moral responsibility toward one another and the natural world into tangible agreements, approaches, and plans of action.

A rich and deepening consciousness of the oneness of humankind is the only way that the obstacles inherent in dichotomies like rich/poor, north/south, developed/developing can be overcome. Designations of this kind are not without basis, for some countries *do* have more financial resources than others. But while such realities are not to be denied, neither should they be allowed to paralyze constructive action. Rather, they should be incorporated into the perspective that an integrated, sustainable and prosperous world will not be built by “us” working together with “them”, but by all of us working on behalf of everyone.

The principle of the oneness of humankind highlights the powerful connections found between raising the well-being of people and reversing environmental degradation. It is true that the ecological footprint of certain areas is far larger than that of others. This is a reality that will need to be addressed through both voluntary choice and governmental regulation. But equally important will be lifting billions out of poverty in ways that not only reduce harm to the environment, but actively improve it. Addressing social needs in the context of environmental ones responds to the pressing moral imperatives of climate change. But its rationale is highly pragmatic as well, for climate change calls for urgent action, and the dividends of such steps are greater the sooner they are taken.

Efforts of this kind also lay a foundation for valuing people and the planet as explicitly as profit has been. It is widely recognized today that the single-minded pursuit of financial gain has all too often led to the destruction of both natural systems and human lives. This legacy has left deep ambivalence about the role the corporate sector and market forces should play in sustainability efforts. Such questions are complex and not simply answered. But what seems imperative is that good faith efforts be integrated into a just global effort that avoids all forms of exclusion that breeds opposition, hostility, defensiveness, and distrust.

In these days the East is in need of material progress and the West is in want of a spiritual idea. It would be well for the West to turn to the East for illumination, and to give in exchange its scientific knowledge. There must be this interchange of gifts.

The East and the West must unite to give to each other what is lacking. This union will bring about a true civilization, where the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material.

Receiving thus the one from the other the greatest harmony will prevail, all people will be united, a state of great perfection will be attained, there will be a firm cementing, and this world will become a shining mirror for the reflection of the attributes of God.

We all, the Eastern with the Western nations, must strive day and night with heart and soul to achieve this high ideal, to cement the unity between all the nations of the earth. Every heart will then be refreshed, all eyes will be opened, the most wonderful power will be given, the happiness of humanity will be assured. – Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, pp. 21-22.