



Australian Bahá'í Community

THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY

A Structural Framework for Sustainable Foreign Policy:

The Australian Baha'i Community welcomes this opportunity to provide its views to the White Paper Task Force on issues of foreign policy facing Australia. The Bahá'í Community believes that sustainable progress in addressing the key foreign policy questions facing Australia requires the recognition and application of the principle of the oneness of humanity.

Until the oneness of humanity is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet, and thus Australia as part of this global whole, will find solution. This is simply because all of the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional. The soundness of this observation can be seen reflected in developments as diverse as trade, security, environmental sustainability, poverty eradication and human rights.

Indeed one of the most profound lessons of the September 11 attack on the United States is that the problem of global terrorism requires far greater coherence and unity of national measures across a wide range of fields if this global problem is to be dealt with effectively. It is a lesson of general application to all the foreign policy issues facing Australia. From this perspective "unity" rather than being an unattainable goal to be addressed after immediate and more pressing problems are resolved, is instead an essential prerequisite for dealing with these diverse problems which are themselves symptoms of this underlying cause: disunity.

The reality is that there is only the one human race. We are a single people, inhabiting the planet Earth, one human family bound together in a common destiny.

The reality of human oneness is endorsed by science. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, sociology and, most recently, genetics, in its decoding of the human genome, demonstrate that there is only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. The world's great religions likewise uphold the principle.

The contemporary realization of humanity's oneness comes after a historic process in which individuals were fused into ever-greater units. Moving from clans, to tribes, to city-states, to nations, the next inevitable step for humanity is the creation of a global civilization. As stated by Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, more than 100 years ago: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens".

Further, as proposed in the Bahá'í writings, the oneness of humanity "implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarisation of the whole civilized world - a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

In 1912, the then head of the Bahá'í community, Abdu'l-Bahá, undertook an extensive tour of North America, resulting in widespread publicity and interest in all strata of US and Canadian society. He was asked by a high ranking US government official how best he could serve the interests of his nation and people. The official was advised that he could best serve his country by striving, as a citizen of the world, for the eventual application of the principle of federalism underlying the government of his own country to the relationships between the nations and peoples of the world.

It is advice that resonates with our own traditions as a nation, which has exemplified evolving federalism and has shown how much benefit it can bring to a people. As we enter a new century and a new millennium it is an idea calling for renewed examination as a long term goal - while short-term reforms are advocated and achieved.

In short, the protection and advancement of our national interest is intimately tied to the health and effectiveness of the international systems that give expression to the reality of our human oneness. The following comments, based on the Australian Baha'i Community submission to the parliamentary inquiry on Australia's relations with the United Nations, reflect particularly on the role of that body. However the general model outlined above applies equally well to Australia's interests in its bilateral and regional relations and in a range of other international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation.

We are also enclosing a paper entitled *Who is Writing the Future*, which further addresses these issues and provides a review of 20th century developments that help to place these ideas in context.

AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Reform of the General Assembly:

The functioning of the United Nations and its relationship with its component member states carries significant implications for the long term well-being and prosperity of Australia and the world. Undoubtedly the United Nations has already played a profound part in construction of a more peaceful and unified world. Nonetheless the objectives for which the United Nations was established remain unfulfilled in many respects.

Australia can make a notable contribution to a world which better realises these objectives by a vigorous and measured advocacy of those reforms which are necessary to enable the United Nations to deliver on "the peoples" aspirations for a world which is at once more peaceful, more cooperative, more united and which ensures the protection of the basic rights and freedoms of every human being.

Gradual institutional reform has of course characterized Australia's own development from its origins as separate colonies to an independent and modern Federal democracy. There can now be no doubt that the world is moving towards ever-increasing interdependence and integration: this is true in fields as diverse as sport, economics and regional and international politics. This gradual development represents a fundamental transformation with which the world is seeking to come to terms.

"Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching ... World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving."
- Bahá'í Writings

This longer term perspective remains true irrespective of the immediate time frame that we consider. It however may be overlooked if we confine our perspective to only the short period of time immediately past or before us.

Issues of national sovereignty can be best considered in this light. National sovereignty has in the twentieth century played a complex role. On the one hand it has delivered freedom and independence to peoples who were subjected to domination and exploitation. On the other it has contributed to disastrous conflicts between and within nations, denying individuals the basis of a peaceful life. It has been one of the principal hindrances to the development of an effective and just system of international governance. Like anything - carried beyond moderation - national sovereignty's beneficial effects are outweighed by its harmful aspects.

In respect of the United Nations, attachment to the concept of sovereignty has thus far prevented the General Assembly developing into an institution which truly reflects the will of the people - which is a true forum for the promulgation of law and which is truly representative of humanity at large. Australia, we believe, should advocate those values and methods at international level that have served Australian people so well at the national, state and local level. Like any form of governance, trust and legitimacy can only be built on the basis of a close relationship with the people whose interests the governance is designed to serve. The General Assembly and its voting structure, as well as reflecting the state system, must come to represent more accurately the people of the world. In addition its resolutions must gradually come to possess the force of law.

The Capacity of the United Nations to Protect Human Rights:

Two principal problems face United Nations work for the protection of human rights: lack of enforcement and follow-up and an insufficient emphasis on responsibilities as the counterpart and guarantor of human rights. These issues both require attention.

Without sufficient resources the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms will continue to be hampered. We suggest that Australia continue to advocate for an increase in the resources allocated to human rights to reflect their importance to the mandate of the United Nations.

We also urge Australia to accord priority to other measures to increase the effectiveness, soundness and influence of the United Nations human rights system.

The United Nations and Human Rights Education:

The general lack of awareness of human rights, particularly among those entrusted with administering justice at the local level, is an obstacle to the full protection of human rights. The discussion of human rights needs to be moved from the area of legal and political policy making to the local community, where the lives of individuals will be touched and lasting changes can be made. Educating those who administer justice about basic human rights is just the beginning. The Bahá'í Community calls for Australia to play an even greater role in the promotion of human rights education, with the aim of creating a "culture of human rights."

Human rights education, if it is to succeed, must seek to transform individual attitudes and behaviour and thereby establish, within every local and national community, a new "culture" of respect for human rights. Only such a change in the fundamental social outlook of every individual, whether a government official or an ordinary citizen, can bring about the universal observance of human rights principles in the daily lives of people. In the final analysis, the human rights of an individual are respected and protected - or violated - by other individuals, even if they are acting in an official capacity. Accordingly, it is essential to touch the hearts, and elevate the behaviour, of all human beings, if, in the words of the United Nations Plan of Action, human rights are to be transformed "from the expression of abstract norms" to the "reality" of the "social, economic, cultural and political conditions" experienced by people in their daily lives.

Human rights education over the long term promises to make a profound contribution to understanding between nations, as well as to the domestic conditions faced by citizens. Australia has long been a supporter of human rights education in international forums. We invite the government to consider the continued contribution that can be made by the United Nations system to the furtherance of human rights education.

CONCLUSION

Australia's historical and geographic circumstances combine to give Australia a distinctive perspective on issues of international governance as well as a relative (although far from absolute) freedom from the concerns and threats that enmesh many other countries of the world.

From this place Australia has the potential to view the world with a clearer vision and to make a disproportionate contribution to the welfare of the world and thus to that of its own people. It can best do so through application of the principle of the oneness of humanity to the foreign policy issues which Australia faces and by contributing to greater unity among and between nations, through reform of the United Nations to increase its effectiveness, and in the diversity of other fields with which foreign policy deals.

The Australian Baha'i Community hopes that Australia may be a leader in the emergence of a world which gives better expression to our common humanity; a world that is free of racism, terrorism and other global afflictions.