



Australian Bahá'í Community

THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY

A statement in response to the themes of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, 2001

Racism originates not in the skin but in the human mind. Remedies to racial prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance must accordingly address those mental illusions that have given rise to false concepts of superiority and inferiority among human populations.

At the root of all forms of discrimination and intolerance is the mistaken idea that humankind is composed of separate and distinct races, peoples or castes, and that those sub-groups possess varying intellectual, moral, and/or physical capacities, which in turn justify different forms of treatment.

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, a single entity created from one same substance, obligated to "be even as one soul".

A proper understanding of the oneness of humanity can carry humanity beyond intermediate notions of tolerance or multi-culturalism - concepts that are important stepping-stones to building a peaceful, just and unified world but insufficient for the eradication of such deeply rooted afflictions as racism.

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 Founders of the world's great religions have all promised that one day peace and justice would prevail and all humanity would be united.

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 more than 100 years ago:

The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.

Further, as explained 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 considering the themes of the World Conference against Racism, a proper understanding of oneness of humanity holds a number of implications.

It implies that any law, tradition or mental construct that grants superior rights or privileges to one grouping of humanity over another is not only morally wrong but fundamentally at odds with the best interests of even those who consider themselves to be in some way superior.

It implies that nation-states, as the building blocks of a global civilization, must hold to common standards of rights and take active steps to purge from their laws, traditions and practices any form of discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin.

It implies that justice must be the ruling principle of social organization, a corollary principle that calls for widespread measures on the part of governments, their agencies, and civil society to address economic injustice at all levels.

Issues of xenophobia in relation to contemporary problems of minority diasporas, the uneven application of citizenship laws, and refugee resettlement can likewise best be addressed in the light of humanity's oneness and the concept of world citizenship.

Further, the principle of the oneness of humanity exposes any attempt to distinguish separate "races" or "peoples" in the contemporary world as artificial and misleading. While racial, national and/or ethnic heritage can be considered as sources of pride and even a backdrop for positive social development, such distinctions should not become a basis for new forms of separation or superiority, however subtle.

Over the years, the Bahá'í Community has supported or called for specific actions in support of human oneness and the fight against racism, including:

- The widespread promotion of international educational campaigns that would teach the organic oneness of humankind, involving national and local governments, as well as non-governmental organizations.
- The widespread ratification of, and adherence to, international instruments, which represent humankind's collective conscience and might contribute to a comprehensive legal regime for combating racism and racial discrimination, especially the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- The worldwide promotion of human rights education, with the aim of creating a "culture of human rights."

The principle of human oneness is not another way of talking about the ideal of brotherhood or solidarity. It reflects, rather, an eternal spiritual, moral and physical reality that has been brought into focus because, for the first time in history, it has become possible for all of the peoples of the world to perceive their interdependence and to become conscious of their wholeness.

The expression of the oneness of humanity is the motive force underlying the diverse challenges facing our global community. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solution, because all of the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal not particular or regional.

(Based on a statement by the Bahá'í International Community to the World Conference Against Racism, 25 August 2001).