

**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FROM THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**  
**Green Pilgrimage Network**

Of all the critical problems confronting humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the degradation of our environment illustrates most clearly the obsolete and destructive nature of the competitive and materialistic ethos that dominates our world, as well as the divisive political, social and economic systems that draw their legitimacy from it.

The natural world is deeply respected and cherished in the Bahá'í Faith, as a creation of God brought into being for the benefit of its diverse inhabitants. We are beneficiaries of a heavenly gift upon which we are totally reliant and to which we are indebted.

We view the degradation of the environment, at its core, as a spiritual and ethical issue. Even as this burning issue challenges our ability to crystallize a new vision of prosperity and solidarity embracing the infinite diversity of humankind, it raises pressing and difficult issues of immediate, concrete action at the level of the individual, the organization and the community. Given the nature and scale of the problem, local and personal action will prove ineffectual without the emergence of a new paradigm at the global level. At the same time, efforts to bring about the desired resolution focused exclusively on influencing global discourses are unlikely to succeed without coherence and continual learning that can only come from resolute, systematic engagement in a process of action, reflection and consultation addressing concrete problems. In short, these twin processes require a transformation of the heart. The approach that the Bahá'í International Community has adopted to foster this transformation is detailed in our Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change submitted to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation in 2009.

In our collective efforts to combat environmental degradation, as with any of the world's issues, we cannot ignore the need for the unification of its peoples. In addition, we must earnestly strive to abolish all forms of prejudice, to discover the natural harmony between science and religion, to realize full equality between men and women, to ensure universal access to education, and to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty. These goals are interconnected with the preservation of the environment and cannot be dealt with in isolation.

The Bahá'í International Community, a member of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation since 1987, welcomes the launch of the "Green Pilgrimage Network" because of the opportunity it offers to consult, work and learn together with others on both theoretical and practical levels, with the aim of achieving the degree of coherence that will be necessary to make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of the existential challenges facing our world.

**Spiritual underpinnings from the Bahá'í Writings**

The efforts of the worldwide Bahá'í community in the area of the environment are guided by the teachings of the Faith, including the principles enunciated in the following extracts from the Bahá'í Writings:

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of the Most Great Light. ... How resplendent are the luminaries of knowledge that shine within an atom and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop.<sup>1</sup>*

*Every man of discernment, while walking on the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance and vainglory.<sup>2</sup>*

*If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been for goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation...<sup>3</sup>*

*[Justice and impartiality] means to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. It means, in brief, to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest.<sup>4</sup>*

*The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.<sup>5</sup>*

*We need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped if human salvation is to be secured.<sup>6</sup>*

## **Pilgrimage and the Environment**

Sites of pilgrimage have been sanctified by their association with holy souls, which elevates the station of these sacred places to one worthy not only of respect, but also of reverence. By engaging with the spirit of these spots, we can be assisted to rise to a higher level of consciousness about our responsibilities to our world and to translate this into practical expressions.

So central is the role of pilgrimage in a person's spiritual development that Bahá'u'lláh made it an obligation to be performed at least once in the lifetime of any believer financially able to make the journey. At the present time, Bahá'í pilgrimage takes the form of a nine-day program of visits to the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb and places associated with the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, all located on or near the coast of northern Israel, between Haifa and Nahariya. Pilgrim groups are scheduled during a nine-month season that runs from late October until the end of July. The logistical hub of the pilgrimage program is in Haifa.

Participants in this program reflect the diversity and geographical spread of the Bahá'í community, and the Bahá'í institutions are working to make pilgrimage ever more widely accessible to believers from all walks of life and all 235 countries and territories where the Faith has taken root. As the community grows and matures, we fully expect the flow of Bahá'í pilgrims to increase dramatically in the years to come.

Since it requires international travel, Bahá'í pilgrimage necessarily involves substantial economic and environmental costs, but greater efforts can be made to promote values of simplicity, to minimize waste and other harmful side-effects, and to ensure that the planning for future expansion of the pilgrimage program takes full account of environmental factors and the need for sustainable solutions, all without sacrificing the spiritual nature of the pilgrimage experience or the goal of making it universally accessible.

## **Pledge of Support**

Within the framework outlined above, the Bahá'í World Centre will work closely with the Municipality of Haifa and other local stake-holders to reduce the environmental impact associated with Bahá'í visitors by promoting the use of public transport; propagating sound environmental practices in the hospitality sector; improving the management of scarce resources such as energy and water; reducing waste and ensuring that more of it is recycled; and encouraging individual

pilgrims to play an active and responsible role in caring for the environment both during their pilgrimage and back in their home communities. Recognizing that we have much to learn and a great deal to do to improve the environmental sustainability of our own operations, our approach will be incremental and collaborative.

We look forward to collaborating with all the other participants in this international, inter-faith endeavor, utilizing the diverse facets of human creativity from the spiritual to the technical, to make the world a better place, in terms of both the physical environment of the planet and the well-being of its present and future inhabitants.

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<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), pp. 177-8.

<sup>2</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p.44.

<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 343.

<sup>4</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p.39.

<sup>5</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 286.

<sup>6</sup> From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 27 May, 1932 to an individual believer, *The Compilation of Compilations* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2000), vol. 1, p. 85.