

Universal Peace Federation  
(Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace)

Statement to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social  
Development on the review of the  
First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty

*Perspectives and Alliances That Address the Root  
Causes of Poverty  
and Advance the Development Agenda*

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Mr. Chaiman,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Dear NGO colleagues,

The international community has voiced its commitment to the eradication of poverty for decades. These voices eventually sang "one song" in 2000, when Member States took the bold step of setting targets for these commitments, and these became as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a collective commitment to reducing extreme poverty by half by the year 2015.

Now more than one third of the way to our target date, the Under-Secretary-General of Economic and Social Affairs notes in his statement to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development, "We find ourselves still far short of our goal to eradicate global poverty." We are not on track and we are floundering, already having realized that our previous focus on economic growth as the panacea to development problems was naïve.

The 2005 report on the world situation, "The Inequality Predicament," underscored the "stickiness" of poverty and the reality of persistent and deepening inequalities worldwide, between skilled and unskilled workers and in the growing disparities in health, education and opportunities for social economic and political participation. This realization led to efforts to address inequalities "within and between countries."

However, if our global family of nations fails to address the heart of the issues—the human heart—each new commitment, hope and good global intention will also remain unfulfilled. We are in need of a comprehensive roadmap that allows us to face the deep-rooted human obstacles to poverty reduction as well as the plans and strategies for sustained economic growth. We cannot continue to search only for some ghost in our global machinery.

The really sticky areas of development reside in human behaviors, propensities and the intangibles that guide our decision-making processes. Awareness of the need to intensify consideration of the social implications of economic policies and make this "more central to economic policy-making at the national

and international levels<sup>1</sup>” is growing, but it has barely engaged with adequate “expertise” in this field also at the table. We therefore seek to underscore in the Commission for Social Development’s overall review of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty serious consideration and courage to seek solutions in unconventional places.

In the Bahá’i International Community’s submission to the 2006 Commission on Social Development was a call for the “foundation for a new social and international order, capable of creating and sustaining conditions in which human beings can advance morally, culturally, and intellectually.”<sup>2</sup> Importantly they recommend “to expand development indicators to assess ethical and moral capacities,” noting that current indicators largely determine what is value and, as such, shape development policy and priorities.<sup>3</sup> Valuing ethical capacities along with economic ones and planning accordingly helps nations to “plan to prevent corruption, and strengthen local capacities for healthier relationships in trade, labor markets, informal economies and so on.”

The General Assembly itself has a number of resolutions recognizing the need for a “new international humanitarian order that corresponds to new realities and challenges, including the development of an agenda for humanitarian action, in accordance with international law.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Another dimension of poverty**

By adding another dimension to the definition of poverty, we can also find additional routes to and strategies for development. By adding to our definition consideration of “poverty of the human spirit,” we can see how undeveloped human beings are diminished by myopic self-centeredness and real-world greed. And this poverty has patterns of its own superimposed on economic poverty, with deep roots and that complicate simple patterns of economic growth and development. This “human factor” cannot be ignored if we are to eradicate poverty, even by half by 2015.

By considering this dimension of poverty, we can see how cultivation of the innate capacity to create, to rise above, to forgive, love and have compassion for others, has a potential to unleash energies and possibilities untapped by the purely economic paradigm.

We must remember clearly that there is no magic panacea in this view of poverty either. However, it does point us in the direction of a more accurate understanding of root causes. For poverty is not in some system, social structure or machinery. It is in human life. There are principles that guide the intangible areas of human life just as there are principles that guide our material and economic lives. But by planning to strengthen the moral and ethical capacities of communities as well as the capacity for compassion, forgiveness and care of others, new possibilities for advancing the development agenda open up. Even new possibilities for tapping political will emerge.

Further, the holistic framework sought in the 1995 World Summit for Social Development expands, and the Copenhagen commitment to tackle “root causes” takes on new light. Even the Millennium Declaration makes a solemn commitment that “We will spare no effort to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing all of these priorities... [and] we solemnly reaffirm, ... that the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development.”<sup>5</sup>

### **New alliances forming to address the human dimension of poverty and violence**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006, 70,000 people gathered at the Seoul, Korea exhibition center to support the Universal Peace Federation’s (Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace) First World Assembly, during which 300 participants from 126 nations further develop the global network of

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development, New York, 8 February 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Bahá’i International Community’s submission to the 2006 Commission on Social Development on the review of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation 5—Bahá’i International Community’s submission to the 2006 Commission on Social Development on the review of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

<sup>4</sup> A/RES/59/171 New International Humanitarian Order. Also A/57/583 and A/59/554

<sup>5</sup> para. 29, 32 A/RES/55/2 Millennium Declaration

Interreligious and International Peace Councils, working committees, peace initiatives and promising practices of the more than 100,000 Ambassadors for Peace worldwide.

Why is this multi-sectoral global network of Peace Councils important at this time to the world's social situation? Not only are these Peace Councils expected to expand to over 150 nations in all regions of the world by the end of 2006, they are energized by practical yet visionary work that cultivates essential human capacities, heightens awareness of the inimitable role of the human spirit, and provides ethical and social empowerment through the strengthening of faith-based communities' dialogue and cooperation with one another and other sectors of society. This means that the Peace Councils also provide a grounded and urgently needed framework for improving inter-religious understanding and cooperation **by and for** religious and faith-based communities in these days of fragile inter-religious relations. More and more, awareness is growing regarding the centrality of constructive inter-religious dialogue and action for peace. To this end, these Peace Councils clearly stand in support of the General Assembly resolution on the promotion of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace<sup>6</sup>.

This emerging global network is linked by a common commitment to peace through the flourishing of the human spirit, nourished and stabilized by a common and powerful desire for strong and loving families.

Mr. Chairman,

As we end this Decade of Poverty Eradication, we are also reviewing the status of vulnerable social groups, and in closing, I would like to bring your attention to rest for a moment on the family and youth, and their key role as instruments and "machinery" of both dimensions of prosperity--economic and spiritual.

The 2005 World Youth Report noted that, "the family, as the primary institution of socialization of youth, continues to play an important role in the prevention of juvenile delinquency and underage crime." Given that conflict and violence have also been identified as both the reasons for and consequences of poverty, it is important to advocate for the centrality of the family to the agenda for the eradication of poverty.

As was also noted in the Report of the Secretary-General in Preparation for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004, "families have major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies."

Indeed, the family is pivotal in life and not only for poverty eradication. Our families are where we can best learn the basics of conflict prevention, reconciliation, compassion, fairness, forgiveness and trust. The family is of paramount importance to comprehensive social development in any society and in the world at large.

Healthy and loving relationships are needed in poorer families as well as in the more privileged ones. Family ties serve as a cushion for our emotional and economic lives. Families, when strengthened, can counter the havoc of material poverty, social stress and can even end the vicious cycles poverty creates. Good and strong families are the breeding ground of mature adults who practice good governance at all levels and are key contributors to the betterment of societies and sensitive to the needs of others. Therefore Mr. Chairman, we promote the universal strengthening of families as a central strategic work for social development at this time.

I thank you.

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<sup>6</sup> A/RES/60/10 Promotion of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace