

Bahá'í International Community's Oral Statement to the  
49<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development

14 February 2011

Efforts to eradicate poverty must be guided by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term—a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual dimensions of human life. Poverty, as has often been stated, is not merely the lack of material resources, but also the absence of those ethical and social resources that create an environment in which individuals, through social institutions and communities, can develop to their fullest capacity.

Developing capacity among individuals, communities and institutions to take charge of their development pathway provides a starting point for efforts to foster prosperity and well-being. An environment must be created in which individuals can cultivate the capacities to become protagonists of their development and to contribute to the well-being of their families and communities.

Of particular concern in seeking to develop these capacities are the many influences at work on the hearts and minds of children and youth. It is important to appreciate the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices of their families and communities. No matter how unintentional, choices which condone deficient ethical norms, such as the admiration for power, the seeking of status, the glorification of violence and pre-occupation with self-gratification, exercise a profound influence on young minds.

Among the roles of public institutions are the exercise of authority as well as moral and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. The institution's role is not to dictate but rather to consult among its members and, as much as possible, with the people it serves and represents. Embodying a high sense of duty, justice and devotion to public welfare, institutions can hope to win the confidence, support and esteem of those whom they serve.

Vibrant communities are also agents of change. Their vitality derives from the degree to which they are able to develop and strengthen the capacities of individuals and institutions of which they are comprised. The development of human capacities for justice, honesty, cooperation, and freedom from prejudice, promotes bonds of trust and reciprocity that form the basis of community life. The obligations of the community extend to the provision of employment and fair wages, health care, rest and recreation. In this way, communities can improve the social and economic life of a population.

Moreover they can foster the capacity of a population to play its role in the creation of a more just and inclusive society.

Broader visions of human prosperity—those that consider the relationship between the spiritual and material dimensions of human life—are moving from the periphery to the center of public discourse. It is becoming clear that poverty eradication efforts will need to consider the relationships between the development and well-being of the individual, public institutions and community life. The conduit to achieving the well-being and prosperity for all will involve collective processes of experimentation, learning and reflection on action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women and men, children and adults, the rich and the poor, the governors and the governed. As the sweeping tides of oppression, in the forms of extreme poverty and extreme wealth recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.

We invite the delegates gathered at the Commission to explore the role that communities can and should play in promoting well-being and prosperity.