

Bahá'í International Community's Oral Statement  
to the 45th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

**Youth and Adolescents Education in Service of Community**

Thank you, Honorable Chair.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies & Gentlemen,

The Baha'i International Community is pleased that the Commission has chosen to focus on youth and adolescents. It is during this critical period that young people begin to consciously explore and apply their values and beliefs about individual and collective life, and it is especially during this time that individuals begin to realize their potential as protagonists of change in their communities and nations.

Despite the many challenges that our young people are inheriting, we must not see them as merely victims. Rather, youth and adolescents represent a tremendous source of intellectual and social potential waiting to be channeled towards constructive ends.

Our contribution to this Session of the Commission focuses on education. Specifically, we wish to draw attention to a particular dimension of education, namely *education in service of community*, which, in our experience, is central to the transformation of the individual and community life. The future of today's society will depend to a great extent on the manner in which educational programs are designed to release the latent potential of youth. Therefore, formal education needs to go beyond the exclusive aim of helping young people secure gainful employment. Educational processes should assist youth to recognize and express their potential while developing their capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of their communities.

This two-fold moral purpose—to develop one's potential and to channel that potential to the betterment of society—provides an important axis of the educational process. If we examine the influences shaping the minds of youth and adolescents, we can see that many forces breed passivity and a desire to be entertained. In line with this trend, many educational programs perceive young people as mere receptacles of information. The worldwide Bahá'í community, in collaboration with many others, is endeavoring to develop a culture which promotes an independent way of thinking, studying and acting, in which students are active, self-directed, and united by a desire to work towards the common good.

Though conditions vary greatly from community to community, the centrality of knowledge to the flourishing of youth and adolescents remains unchanged. Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and the responsibility to generate new knowledge and apply it in socially beneficial ways rests on the shoulders of every young person. In the same way, the creation of an environment conducive to this process is a duty of every government.

Meaningful participation also takes the form of safe and productive employment. Education that does not instill in youth an awareness of their role as active citizens, and the needs of their communities, further weakens young people's prospects for employment. This in turn fuels the exodus of educated youth from rural to urban areas, and from non-industrialized to industrialized nations. Young people, though often perceived as simply the beneficiaries of education, must be involved in the development of educational systems. In this way, educational processes could be more closely aligned with the needs and aspirations of the youth and their communities.

All have the right and responsibility to play their part in the betterment of society and the advancement of civilization. To this end, the inequities of girls' access to quality education must be addressed. Governments must urgently follow through on their commitments to prohibit the unjust practices of infanticide, prenatal sex selection, female genital mutilation, trafficking of girl children and the use of girls in prostitution and pornography. Addressing these critical challenges and extending educational opportunities to girls rests on the understanding that the equality of men and women, boys and girls is more than a desirable condition to be achieved for the good of society; indeed, it is a fundamental truth about human reality.

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The investments that governments make in the education and health of their youth and adolescents represent no less than an investment in the stability, security and prosperity of the nation itself. Educational approaches and methods, guided by the needs and aspirations of respective communities, supported by families and social institutions, and inspired by the awareness of inestimable potential latent in every child, will awaken youth and adolescents not only to their own intellectual capabilities but also to their role as protagonists of change in their communities and in the world.