

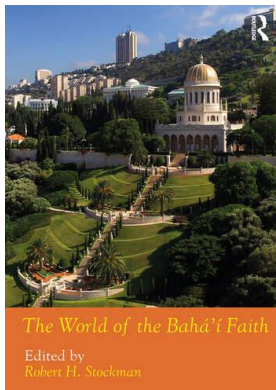
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## **The World of the Bahá'í Faith**

Robert H. Stockman

### **Governance**

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Graham Hassall

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## GOVERNANCE

*Graham Hassall*

This article explores the concept and practice of governance in Bahá'í literature. It commences with a review of the 'critique' of contemporary governance offered in the Bahá'í Writings, identifies proposals for innovation and reform, and some specific principles upon which Bahá'í communities and institutions are building experience. The Bahá'í Writings anticipate 'far-reaching changes in the governance of human affairs and in the institutions created to carry it out' (Bahá'í International Community 1995a: 14). But whereas the Bahá'í approach shares much in common with various critiques of governance arrangements in the modern era, and indeed agrees broadly with a range of constructive solutions currently in hand, its point of distinction is the underlying premise that the world system and all the peoples and nations within it constitute an organic whole (in Bahá'í terminology, 'the oneness of humankind'), whose many problems can be effectively addressed through pursuit of the global interest, rather than the interest of any particular people or nation. The significance of this viewpoint will be explored in the following sections.

Bahá'í perspectives are underpinned by several additional propositions: First, the prophetic religions have contributed fundamental governance ideas and ideals. From the impact of the teachings of Buddha, Krishna, and Zoroaster on civilisations in the East, to the dispensations of Abraham, Moses, Christ, and Muhammad, which emerged in the Orient but contributed so much to the rise of the West, religious laws and exhortations have been made the basis of systems of justice ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations* 101). Second, governments exist to create conditions under which their citizens can prosper. Third, the key facilitating conditions for the establishment of such prosperity is unity. Fourth, the rights and interests of individuals, communities, and the state are interconnected rather than antagonistic or mutually exclusive. And fifth, that all of the conditions alluded to previously are only possible through transformations that commence at the level of the individual person.

The term *governance* refers, generally, to the way an entity is managed. The entity governed might be a people, a country, a business, a family, or an individual; and the governing might be done by oneself, or one might come under the governorship of some other person, or group of people, or institution. There are thus many possibilities as to what is being governed, by what procedure and principles (how), for what purposes (why), by whom, on what authority, and with what results. Contemporary approaches to governance tend to focus on issues of transparency and accountability, and to focus on state-centric approaches. In Bahá'í perspective,

process and procedure are important, as are institutions—but these are not the boundaries of this expansive topic.

The concept of *governance* is distinct from, but related to, that of *government*. Whereas *government* implies institutions established to exercise public authority, *governance* implies the processes, rules, values, and forms of interaction, used to implement action—whether this be by a government or a non-government entity. Further complexity of definition emerges when governance is examined as it relates to leadership, sovereignty, power, legitimacy, consultation and decision-making, justice, reward, punishment, conflict, progress, and coherence/unity. Clearly, the concept of governance has political, legal, spiritual, ethical, economic, and other dimensions, which can only be commented on in brief in this short chapter, in which we define governance succinctly as 1) the manner in which individuals, communities, and those in authority interact while defining and exercising their interwoven rights and responsibilities; and (2) how these interwoven rights and responsibilities are negotiated in light of ever-evolving circumstances.

### Critique of the ‘lamentably defective’ world order

Bahá’í texts are generally critical of public and political leadership performance in the late modern period, yet simultaneously optimistic about prospects for world order. In the Tablet of Maqṣúd, Bahá’u’lláh states: ‘The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective’ (*Tablets* 171). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá critiqued the leadership of both East and West in such works as *The Secret of Divine Civilization* as well as in His public addresses in North America and Europe, while Shoghi Effendi continued this critique when commenting on the international order as it operated from the 1920s into the 1950s.

These critiques continue to be elaborated in statements by the Universal House of Justice and its agencies, including the UN-accredited NGO, the Bahá’í International Community (BIC). Although the experience of the Bahá’í community has been offered as a ‘model for study’ (Universal House of Justice, *Promise of World Peace* 27), scholarly literature on this topic remains anticipatory and embryonic, and necessarily focused more on the identification of the principles of Bahá’í governance than on current practice and results.

Bahá’u’lláh criticised the leaders of His time for putting their own interests before those of their people, and for engaging in warfare and contest at the expense of international cooperation (particularly in regard to the establishment of a global assembly to establish a collective security agreement to limit arms and allow for greater expenditure on health, education, and welfare). Failures to correct the injustices that Bahá’u’lláh suffered at the hands of Persian and Ottoman leaders were further evidence of tyrannical governance and resulted, He inferred, in their downfall. In addition to critique, Bahá’u’lláh noted the positive features of the political systems of His day, commending the ‘republican form’ of government while preferring that the role of monarchy be retained (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 28), and praising the British system for being ‘adorned with the light of both kingship and of the consultation of the people’ (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 93).

These themes and others were elaborated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in texts including *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (first published in 1882 and addressed primarily to the rulers and people of Persia—modern-day Iran) and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (which brought together His public talks given in North America in 1912). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted the failure of leaders to educate the masses, an inaction that inhibited not only the development of individuals and communities, but the progress of society as a whole, through failing to cultivate expertise in the essential fields of science, arts, commerce, government, law, diplomacy, and very many additional other disciplines. This inattention extended to Persia’s unwillingness to adopt innovations—including

in public administration—which were then occurring in the West. Yet even in the West, long-established systems were under review:

Today sciences of the past are useless. The Ptolemaic system of astronomy, numberless other systems and theories of scientific and philosophical explanation are discarded, known to be false and worthless. Ethical precedents and principles cannot be applied to the needs of the modern world. Thoughts and theories of past ages are fruitless now. Thrones and governments are crumbling and falling. All conditions and requisites of the past unfitted and inadequate for the present time, are undergoing radical reform.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations* 18)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted progress in the cause of democracy (*Promulgation* 197) and the spread of the rule of law and constitutionalism. ‘What a wonderful century this is!’, He observed in a speech given in Boston in May 1912,

It is an age of universal reformation. Laws and statutes of civil and federal governments are in process of change and transformation. Sciences and arts are being moulded anew. Thoughts are metamorphosed. The foundations of human society are changing and strengthening.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 144)

Shoghi Effendi, after becoming Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith at the end of 1921, closely observed world conditions consequent to the post-WWI Treaty of Versailles peace agreements. Although these agreements established the League of Nations to prevent future inter-state conflict and to coordinate social and economic progress, they were nonetheless premised on the superiority of the Western nations over all others, and within this elite group, on the hegemony of the victors over the vanquished, who faced a ‘punitive’ reparations schedule to compensate for the costs of the 1914–1918 conflict. These embedded inequities sowed the seeds of the Second World War.

In *The Promised Day Is Come* and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, Shoghi Effendi noted in some detail the rise of nationalism and secularism in the early twentieth century. He traced ‘intolerant and militant nationalism’, for instance, to a Hegelian philosophy which deified the state (*World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 182). Economically ‘narrow’ and ‘brutal’ nationalism, reinforced by a post-war theory of self-determination, had resulted in ‘high prohibitive tariffs’ which in turn ‘inhibited the healthy flow of international trade and finance’ (ibid. 35). Many national leaders opposed such developments as the Geneva Protocol, the idea of a United States of Europe, and an Economic Union of Europe, through belief that allegiance to any form of internationalism would ‘sap the loyalty’ required for the continued existence of the nation states, and in taking this approach, failed to adapt national processes, ‘suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations’, to present-day needs (ibid. 36).

Shoghi Effendi also associated the rise of nationalism with the demise of religious belief, noting that in some instances nationalist movements had included a ‘conscious, avowed and organised attack on Christianity’, had been associated with a ‘systematized work of defamation against all forms of ecclesiastical influence’, had contributed to de-Christianisation of the masses, and to the decline of the authority, prestige, and power of the Church (ibid. 182). The downfall of religious institutions and empires was associated with the emergence of materialist, atheistic, and nationalistic philosophies, which were in turn aligned with assertions of the superiority of one nation or race over all others. Democracies had been established in place of kingdoms and

empires, but the absence of any philosophy of virtue, of restraint, or placement of individual rights and freedoms in a context of collective responsibility was merely a harbinger of anarchy (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 254–5).

Cultivation of partisan movements, viewed by many as a political tool essential to the aggregation of societal preferences, precipitated ideological conflict and inhibited the use of reason and logic in dialogue on public policy issues. The quest for positions of leadership through nomination and campaigning would distort information available to voters, limit their preferences, and favour the interests of dominant personalities. Formation of the United Nations on the Westphalian philosophy of nation-state sovereignty consolidated inter-state national economic and political rivalry and inhibited the necessary depth and breadth of global policy, law, and action.

These and other themes have been reiterated and elaborated periodically by the Universal House of Justice. In *The Promise of World Peace* (1985), written ‘to the Peoples of the world’ and delivered to world leaders during the United Nations’ International Year of Peace (1986), the Universal House of Justice emphasised the inevitability of world peace but noted uncertainty as whether it will be achieved ‘only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity’s stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or by an act of consultative will’. Additional critiques of the international order in the last quarter of the twentieth century are presented in the BIC’s *Turning Point for all Nations* (Bahá’í International Community 1995b), issued on the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations; *Who is Writing the Future*, issued to mark the century’s end (Bahá’í International Community 1999); and *A Governance Befitting*, published to mark the UN’s 75th anniversary (Bahá’í International Community 2020).

*The Prosperity of Humankind*, a strategy for global development distributed at the United Nations Summit on Social Development in 1995, suggests that reassessment of structures and processes of government will include redefinition of the terms ‘power’ and ‘authority’; formulation of laws that are ‘universal in both character and authority’ (Bahá’í International Community 1995a: 8); reformulation of consultative practices and of concepts of justice; a conscious effort to ensure that ‘technological breakthroughs’ and ‘limited resources’ are not reserved for ‘privileged minorities’ (10); and the continued development of laws protecting human rights and the whole range of civil, political, social, and economic rights (13). World order cannot proceed, in the Bahá’í view, until the principle of the ‘oneness of mankind’ gains widespread acceptance. However, consciousness of the ‘oneness of humanity’ presents a challenge to ‘most of the institutions of contemporary society’ because it rejects the conflict that is ‘built in’ to current processes and structures in such forms as adversarial structures of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, the struggle between ‘classes and other social groups’ (e.g., ethnic and religious conflict), and the ‘competitive spirit in much of modern life’ (Bahá’í International Community 1995a). Among specific observations of current practice, it criticises the lack of citizen involvement in local-level decision-making:

Future generations . . . will find almost incomprehensible the circumstance that, in an age paying tribute to an egalitarian philosophy and related democratic principles, development planning should view the masses of humanity as essentially recipients of benefits from aid and training. Despite acknowledgment of participation as a principle, the scope of the decision making left to most of the world’s population is at best secondary, limited to a range of choices formulated by agencies inaccessible to them and determined by goals that are often irreconcilable with their perceptions of reality.

(Bahá’í International Community 1995a: 4)

In short, *The Prosperity of Humankind* demonstrates the breath-taking scope of the Bahá'í program of governance reform, from local to global levels, and encompasses not only political and legal fundamentals, but the roles of science and technology in the global distribution of knowledge and power.

Contemporary literature on governance mirrors many of the concerns expressed in Bahá'í texts but is careful to couch them in secular rather than religious terms. Whereas the Bahá'í Writings refer to a moral decay resulting from declining adherence to religious values, governance scholarship limits itself to suggesting that corruption and malfeasance result from loss of trust in public institutions, lack of transparency in processes and conflicts of interest, breakdowns in shared public ethics, failures of leadership, and poor accountability structures. Similarly, where government authorities are restricted to responding to challenges posed as problems of law and/or ethics, a Bahá'í reading views these challenges as not only deficiencies in law, ethics, and morality, but in fundamental spiritual values pertaining to the acquisition of virtues.

### Proposals for innovation and reform

The laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh seek not to subvert the existing foundations of society, but to 'broaden its basis', and to 'remould its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world' (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 41). This 'gradualism' in the reform and reorganisation of society, as explained by Danesh (2009), anticipates some governance innovations in the short term but others over a much longer period, consequent to the establishment of necessary facilitating conditions. Shoghi Effendi envisages a series of transitions to the 'World Order of Bahá'u'lláh' via intermediate stages, referred to as a Bahá'í world commonwealth, the 'Most Great Peace', and a Bahá'í world civilisation. An important sub-theme in these transitions is the future relations between church and state in Bahá'í perspective. There is no fixed view as to whether these global changes will be evolutionary or post-catastrophic.

Apart from the issue of the timing of reform, the Universal House of Justice (2012) has identified 'three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society' as the essential protagonists in future social transformation and enhanced governance. This idea alludes to 1) the agency (capacity/responsibility) of individuals to respond to and shape their environment; 2) societal agency to mediate coherence between individual and collective interests; 3) institutional capability to provide peace, development, freedom, justice, and equity; and 4) the communicative capacities of the various actors in the pursuit of their individual and collective goals. These elements of the governance equation will each be examined in brief.

### The role of the individual

The Bahá'í approach requires re-thinking the values that underpin the roles and responsibilities of individuals and institutions as set out in existing governance frameworks, for whereas governance is most often associated with external entities it commences, in the Bahá'í view, at the level of the individual. Giddens and others have described the historical processes by which the institutions and social conditions of modernity—established first in post-feudal Europe but which became world-historical in their impact in the form of the industrial, capitalist societies of the twentieth century—individualised social relations to the point of alienating individual existence (Giddens 1991). Against this backdrop, the Bahá'í model revives the individual's sense of purpose, together with rights and responsibilities, including participation in democratic processes: In an early communication Shoghi Effendi reminded the Bahá'ís of the 'undoubted right'

of individuals to 'self-expression' and 'freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views' (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 64). The BIC has associated 'releasing the power of the individual' with promoting economic opportunities, better protecting of human rights, improving the status of women, and enhancing moral development (Bahá'í International Community 1995b: 13).

In Bahá'í societies of the future, the idea and ideals of the 'citizen' will necessarily be expanded and presumably devolve more responsibility onto the individual. The laws of Bahá'u'lláh constitute the 'divinely appointed ordinances' that will bring about the 'spiritualisation' of the masses (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 162–3). Societies comprising individuals who are capable of self-regulation will expend less energy on coordination, and in turn, societies capable of self-regulation are less in need of state oversight: 'man should know his own self', Bahá'u'lláh states, 'and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 35). Without some degree of self-regulation at the level of the individual, societies and states have few options other than to compel compliance with social rules as agreed by an elected majority or as imposed by a ruling minority.

### The role of the collective: diversity, nations, and nationalism

Bahá'u'lláh states that with freedom comes responsibility. Individuals are responsible for their personal development and for contributing positively to society. The idea of 'society' is more than a collection of 'free individuals', and the Bahá'í Writings state individual freedoms are to be placed in the context of community or group needs. The desired condition is a 'truly enlightened community' in which social policies enhance, in individuals and groups within societies, the highest expressions of the human spirit. An enlightened community expands the independence of the individual, in the context of social cohesion and unity. It reduces the gap between rich and poor, distributes power, and provides opportunities to alter, reassess, and vary its own pace and direction. It emphasises 'development of capacities' rather than 'recognition of rights', or 'provision of services'. Individual freedom was balanced in other messages by Shoghi Effendi by reference to the interests of the 'common weal':

The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 87)

Reciprocal relations between 'the people' and 'the state' are often formulated and expressed in terms of rights and responsibilities. The Bahá'í approach is not based on dichotomies such as 'government v. the people', 'science v. religion', individual rights v. group rights', for such dichotomies misinterpret the essential interrelatedness of government and people, science and religion, individuals and groups. This alternative paradigm sees 'wholes' and 'connectivities' rather than 'oppositions'. Bahá'u'lláh encourages 'free association' between peoples (*Tablets* 181) because familiarity between people leads to 'concord, which is conducive to order' (*Tablets* 187). But this policy requires 'tolerance and righteousness' (*Tablets* 187–8). Bahá'u'lláh refers at length to the promotion of 'fellowship, kindness and unity' (*Tablets* 214) and continually warns of the need to 'flee' from 'anything from which the odour of mischief can be detected' (*Tablets* 217). The concept 'unity in diversity' creates a role for all people in the functioning of the whole.

## The institutions: leadership and democracy

Bahá'í texts envisage the gradual establishment of a new social and political order that reaches from local to global levels, and which draws features from a range of existing philosophies and sets of experience. As explained by Shoghi Effendi (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 152–3):

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

Shoghi Effendi has further explained that the Bahá'í model cannot be associated with any single previous model of governance, such as monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, but 'embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework' the best features of each classical model, while remaining free of their defects. This 'pattern of divine civilization', Shoghi Effendi has written, challenges 'most of the institutions of contemporary society'. It rejects the conflict that is 'built in' to current processes and structures: the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, the struggle between 'classes and other social groups' (e.g., ethnic conflict, religious conflict), and the competitive spirit in much of modern life (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 174).

In brief, key features of the institutional arrangements anticipated in the Bahá'í critique include 1) re-working of their democratic foundations to retain choice of leadership, but exclude partisan methodologies for identifying/selecting them; 2) reimagining consultative processes; 3) expanding collective leadership and decision-making; 4) clarifying the roles of government at local, national, and global levels through application of federal principles; and 5) re-fashioning current international governance institutions and processes to create global institutions required to govern global public policy issues.

The Bahá'í approach to consultation recognises the power of discourse to influence either positively or negatively (Karlberg 2004, 2007). Bahá'u'lláh counsels the proper use of language. The consultative principle, already found in most systems of government, is applauded as 'a lamp of guidance which leadeth the way' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 254). Unfettered consultation is acknowledged as an essential component of a united society. Through it, each can discover the thoughts of others. Any interference with the expression of thoughts leads to distortion of messages, to misunderstandings, and ultimately to disunity. A principle with which it must be associated—albeit an association as yet unappreciated by theories of bureaucratic effectiveness—is that of compassion. The presence of these two capacities—consultation and compassion—allow governments to 'be able to fully acquaint themselves with the condition of the people they govern' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 234).

With growth in social complexity and in the size of moral dilemmas, the capacity to lead with moral clarity is imperative. 'Abdu'l-Bahá extolled the incorruptible leader schooled in both religious and worldly knowledge and expanded on the 'qualities of the spiritually learned' in His early work *The Secret of Divine Civilization*:

While the setting up of parliaments, the organizing of assemblies of consultation, constitutes the very foundation and bedrock of government, there are several essential



requirements which these institutions must fulfil. First, the elected members must be righteous, God-fearing, high-minded, incorruptible. Second, they must be fully cognizant, in every particular, of the laws of God, informed as to the highest principles of law, versed in the rules which govern the management of internal affairs and the conduct of foreign relations, skilled in the useful arts of civilization, and content with their lawful emoluments.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret* 17)

Leaders should be elected in accordance with the will of the people, free of candidacy, campaigns, and partisan groupings. Such ‘popularly’ elected bodies will operate with the support of institutions empowered to advise based on experience and learning. Democracy refers not merely to ‘freedom of speech’, or to the articulation of individual human rights, but to a culture in which the individual feels free to set forth views in an atmosphere of tolerance; in which the people’s elected representatives see themselves as trustees of the public will; in which the people have respect for the decisions of the duly elected authorities; in which the values of diversity, reciprocity, and mutuality are appreciated.

### Global governance and world government

Although Bahá’í communities are not yet at a scale that allows for general implementation of the governance provisions anticipated in the Bahá’í texts, their advocacy of international reform commenced during the lifetime of Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in 1914, shortly before the outbreak of war, that the causes of war should be prevented in advance, that national borders should be properly delimited and marked, and that ‘national integrity’ and ‘permanent independence’ be secured by an ‘impartial, international Commission’, with any remaining disputes arbitrated before a global body (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, ‘Universal Peace’). All of these measures were reiterated decades later in the Commission on Global Governance’s principles for global security (1995).

Although the Bahá’í Writings have long anticipated the establishment of a political compact amongst the world’s leaders, expectations about a ‘Lesser Peace’—borne of mutual fear and distrust rather than love—heightened at the turn of the century. Huddleston (1988), for instance, established a ‘12-point proposal’ for achieving peace by the year 2000, which included creation of a ‘world peace assembly’ and treaties outlawing 1) war between nations (which would require refinement of the legal definition of ‘war’), 2) limiting the range of offensive weapons (as distinct from ‘defensive weapons’), 3) outlawing aggression, 4) establishing a World Peace Council, 5) forming an International Peace Force, 6) and creating an International Peace Fund. Campaigns for a number of these proposals continue to the present time, and some have reached the treaty stage, such as the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In *Collective Security Within Reach*, Ewing (2007) expounds on a number of these themes, including the need for stronger agreement on principles concerning equality of nations and peoples, justice, equity, reward and punishment, and how best to curtail national sovereignty and implement collective action. She adds proposals for the strengthening of supranational monitoring of states’ compliance with arms limitations agreements.

In *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*, Lopez-Claros et al. (2020) offer a comprehensive review of twentieth-century international institutional arrangements, together with suggested ‘foundations for a new global governance system’. They point to the ‘shared values and principles’ that have been put in place (notwithstanding concerns about their degree of implementation) before advocating

ethical foundations for global collective action, and the important role of the values held and lived by each individual in contributing to social cohesion and advancement from the bottom up, as well as to the institutions within which they are active.

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There is no indication that the establishment of the Most Great Peace will occur rapidly. In *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* Shoghi Effendi (203) outlined the constitutional and socio-economic characteristics he envisaged would characterise the Bahá'í Commonwealth. The constitutional characteristics include a world executive, a world parliament, a world tribunal, and protection of individual freedom. The socio-economic characteristics include rapid and efficient world intercommunication; a world language; a world metropolis; a world script/literature; a common currency, weights, and measures; the harmony of science of religion; a world press; the reorganisation of economics; the coordination of markets; the regulation of distribution; the extensions of science and technology; the extermination of disease; improved standards of health; and intellectual refinement.

Bahá'í texts anticipate the establishment of world government, although contemporary negative connotations associated with the term have thus far inhibited a reasoned exploration of the Bahá'í conception. In 1931 Shoghi Effendi (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 43) envisaged a structure 'infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units', but nonetheless

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 . . . a world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of capital and labour definitely recognized . . . in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgement of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship.

The Bahá'í approach endorses the principle of federalism and specifically counsels against the dangers of centralisation—whether at global or any other level (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 141–2).

At the global level, Bahá'í-inspired 'faith-based diplomacy' toward reform of the current international architecture has been directed through the BIC, which has had consultative status at the United Nations since 1948 (Berger 2018). The BIC's 1995 statement *Turning Point for All Nations* offered a concise critique of the UN's structure and performance, in addition to providing several innovative proposals. Key reform suggestions include stiffening performance requirements for member-states, improving the UN's funding model, strengthening the UN's executive branch through limiting the Security Council's veto power and institutionalising the UN's peace-keeping force, and strengthening the mandatory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. The statement also recommended the establishment of an international commission to study national borders and frontiers (which have been a significant cause of conflict in the modern period), adopting a universal language and common script, and examining the possibility of a single international currency.

Unfortunately, the UN's Millennium Assembly and Declaration in 2000 provided ideal opportunities to initiate much-needed reform to global governance—but without any such

result. ‘Glimmers’ of global coordination exist but are often obscured by more compelling signs of resurgent national and racial chauvinism, which have consigned increasing numbers of peoples and countries to intergenerational poverty and conflict under the rule of war-lords, militias, or weaponised clerics.

## Conclusions

The Bahá’í conception of governance is premised on an emerging notion of ‘global public good’ rather than an haphazard combating of social evils (Tomanio et al. 2014). BIC participation in global discourse on poverty, for instance, posited the prospect of building global prosperity rather than ‘combating’ its absence. Very many initiatives exist that mirror Bahá’í approaches to global governance: the promotion of global/world citizenship; creation of ministries of peace; proposals for a single global currency; attempts to ban indiscriminate weapons, including chemical and nuclear weapons, cluster bombs, and small arms; and efforts to make international aggression a war crime. The problems experienced between peoples can now be surmounted. We are at the beginning of the realisation of ‘humanity as one people’ (Bahá’í International Community 1995a). The future can be designed ‘consciously’ and ‘systematically’, but this depends on successfully re-examining our fundamental presuppositions such as ‘prevailing beliefs about the nature and purpose of the development process’ and ‘the roles assigned in it to the various protagonists’ (1995a: 2). An understanding of ‘process’, including historical processes, is part of the new governance mentality that is to be cultivated.

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