

This position, taken from a statement on peace written by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, reiterates the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality between women and men.

Since its inception nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, the Bahá'í Faith has taught the equality of the sexes. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith is the only independent world religion whose Founder has stated unequivocally that women and men are equal.

"Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God," said Bahá'u'lláh.

In accordance with this teaching, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been at the forefront of the movement to advance the rights of women for more than a century. And the Bahá'í approach, which advocates full equality and a firm sense of partnership between women and men, is increasingly recognized as being on the cutting edge of women's issues worldwide.

Bahá'ís understand, for example, that the values which women bring to human interaction are necessary to the proper functioning and advancement of modern society, and that qualities that have formerly been associated with the feminine sides of our natures--such as compassion, nurturing, cooperation and empathy--will be increasingly important in creating a peaceful, just, and sustainable world civilization.

Bahá'í institutions around the world promote various educational efforts for women, and work to raise the consciousness of both women and men about this fundamental equality. Many of its schools, learning centers, and grassroots social and economic development projects specifically include the promotion of women's advancement into their curricula or agendas.

Women compose approximately 30 percent of elected leadership in Bahá'í councils at the national level, comparing favorably



to national parliaments, which average 10 percent women worldwide.

Bahá'í women have long been active in the struggle to promote women's equality. The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844 in Iran and among its early followers was Tahirih, a Persian poet and scholar. In 1852, she laid down her life in defense of her beliefs, which included her right to lay aside the veil and to work for the complete emancipation of women.

Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a member of the first Bahá'í community in Europe, was among the leading figures in promoting the advancement of women in the early years of this century. In the years after World War I, she focused her attention on mobilizing women for peace. She represented the International Council of Women (ICW) in the League of Nations and was President of ICW's Peace and Arbitration Commission.

After World War II, Ms. Dreyfus-Barney played an important role in the development of the relationship between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Martha Root, an American journalist from Pennsylvania, circled the globe several times in the 1920s and 1930s to promote the cause of women's equality--along with the other progressive principles of the Bahá'í Faith. With a unique facility for approaching high dignitaries, she took the Bahá'í message of interdependence and oneness to kings, queens, presidents, ministers, statesmen, professors, clergymen and poets in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Since the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) obtained consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, it has cooperated officially with the United Nations in its work to improve the status of women throughout the world.

The Bahá'í International Community has worked



directly with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and its Secretariat, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, the BIC has established close, cooperative relationships with other international non-governmental organizations at the United Nations that seek to promote the advancement of women.

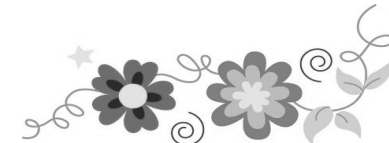
Initially the BIC contributed to the work of the United Nations by submitting statements to United Nations bodies, and in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, on various aspects of equality. Such statements have addressed the education of girls, the importance of elevating the status of women as mothers, the relevance of women's participation at local, national and international levels to the establishment of world peace.

As part of International Women's Year in 1975, the BIC participated in the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. Two Bahá'í representatives were officially accredited to attend the Conference and nine representatives attended the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Tribune, the parallel meeting for non-governmental organizations.

During the next ten years, designated the United Nations Decade for Women, the Bahá'í International Community developed a solid reputation for its work promoting the advancement of women. BIC representatives served on NGO committees on the Status of Women in New York, Geneva and Vienna and participated in the World Conferences on Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, and in Beijing, China in 1995.

The Community's representatives have also been involved in planning parallel activities for NGOs at these meetings. Relationships were established with major organizations worldwide whose focus is also the promotion of the advancement of women.

The BIC collaborates on an increasing basis with UN agencies such as



the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

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“And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -- one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.” -'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Bahá'í Faith

The Emancipation of Women

"The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."