

Peace and Global Governance

Preparing for Public Discourse 4

by Arthur Lyon Dahl July 2022

The governance problem

- National sovereignty: war is the final recourse to impose one state's will on others
- International anarchy, no rule of law
- Struggle for power and world domination
- Push back against multilateralism
- Warfare increasingly dangerous to the survival of the human race
- Multinational corporations out of control
- World filled with ego, corruption and aggression
- Rise of reckless political leaders and autocrats

The promised crises are here

The pandemic with its dead and social chaos

Climate and biodiversity catastrophes

The coming financial crisis – insurmountable debts

Famine already spreading

Now we have war as well

General failure in governance

In general one can say that modern democracies have been established as the outcome of attempts to limit the power of absolute monarchy, of dictatorships, or of certain dominant classes. This may have come about gradually through the centuries, or tumultuously by a series of revolutions. Thus, even when democratic constitutions and structures have been established, there remains a suspicion of authority as such, and a tension between the degree of freedom accorded to individual citizens and the imposition of sufficient public discipline to protect the weak against the selfish pursuits of the strong among the citizenry.

General failure in governance

The operation of transparency, accountability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue is thus imbued with a spirit of partisanship that easily descends into the merciless invasion of personal privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests. The reaction of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and reciprocal misuse of the media—in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in the social fabric.

(Universal House of Justice, to an individual, 18 July 2000)

Nations cling to national sovereignty



Even at the UN, national sovereignty is jealously protected, yet global problems require a global response. Governments do not realize that true national self-interest today is best reflected in global solidarity and a willingness to make short-term sacrifices in the common interest

Progress in the oneness of humanity

This [global] perspective must now evolve to reflect the essential connectedness and common fate of humanity that for too long has struggled against a worldview that emphasized sovereignty, ascendancy and competition. Efforts to reconceptualize sovereignty, from an absolute right to a responsibility, signal that a shift in consciousness towards greater degrees of global solidarity is already underway. To be sure, the solution to climate change exceeds the capacities and resources of any one nation and requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to their means.

(Bahá'í International Community, Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change, 2008)

Progress in the oneness of humanity

The principle of the oneness of humankind... seeks to move beyond utilitarian notions of cooperation to anchor the aspirations of individuals, communities and nations to those of the progress of humanity. In practical terms, it affirms that individual and national interests are best served in tandem with the progress of the whole. As children, women, men, religious and scientific communities as well as governments and international institutions converge on this reality, we will do more than achieve a collective response to the climate change crisis. We will usher in a new paradigm by means of which we can understand our purpose and responsibilities in an interconnected world; a new standard by which to evaluate human progress; and a mode of governance faithful to the ties that bind us as members of one human race.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)

War and peace

Our joy at seeing the community of the Greatest Name go from strength to strength is tempered by our deep sorrow at seeing the persistence of conditions and conflicts in the world that create misery and desperate suffering—in particular, at observing the recrudescence of destructive forces that have disordered international affairs while visiting horrors upon populations. We know well and are reassured that, as Bahá'í communities have repeatedly demonstrated in many different contexts, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are committed to offering relief and support to those around them, no matter how straitened their own circumstances.

War and peace

But until humanity as a whole undertakes to establish its affairs on foundations of justice and truth, it is, alas, fated to stagger from one crisis to another. We pray that, if the recent outbreak of war in Europe is to yield any lessons for the future, it will serve as an urgent reminder of the course that the world must take if it is to attain genuine and enduring peace. The principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh to the monarchs and presidents of His time, and the weighty responsibilities with which He charged rulers past and present, are perhaps even more pertinent and imperative today than when they were first recorded by His Pen.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2022)

War and peace

For Bahá'ís, the inexorable advance of the Major Plan of God—bringing with it ordeals and upheavals, but ultimately impelling humanity towards justice, peace, and unity—is the context within which the Minor Plan of God, with which the believers are chiefly occupied, unfolds. The dysfunctional state of present-day society makes the need for the release of the society-building power of the Faith abundantly clear and pressing. We cannot but expect that, for now, convulsions and disturbances will continue to afflict the world; you will no doubt appreciate, then, why every earnest supplication we offer for all God's children to be relieved from bewilderment and bitter hardship is coupled with an equally heartfelt prayer for the success of the much-needed service you are rendering for the Cause of the Prince of Peace.

THE PROBLEMS ARE GLOBAL BUT GOVERNANCE IS STILL NATIONAL

- Legislation: social definition of ethical limits
- Taxation: wealth redistribution for common services and social security
- International frameworks largely non-binding (labour, health, transport, intellectual property)
- No global mechanism for economic management (IMF, G8, G20, etc.)
- No mechanism for global wealth redistribution
- No international legislation providing common standards or a level playing field for business



Our Common Agenda

Report of the Secretary-General
10 September 2021

acknowledges the need for
global governance reform

Our Common Agenda

First, now is the time to re-embrace **global solidarity** and find new ways to work together for the common good. ...it must include urgent and bold steps to address the triple crisis of climate disruption, biodiversity loss and pollution destroying our planet.

Our Common Agenda

Second, now is the time to renew the **social contract** between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. People need to see results reflected in their daily lives. This must include the active and equal participation of women and girls, without whom no meaningful social contract is possible. It should also include updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods....

Our Common Agenda

Third, now is the time to end the “infodemic” plaguing our world by defending a common, empirically backed consensus around **facts, science and knowledge**. The “war on science” must end. All policy and budget decisions should be backed by science and expertise....

Our Common Agenda

Fourth, now is the time to correct a glaring blind spot in how we **measure economic prosperity and progress**. When profits come at the expense of people and our planet, we are left with an incomplete picture of the true cost of economic growth. As currently measured, gross domestic product (GDP) fails to capture the human and environmental destruction of some business activities. I call for new measures to complement GDP, so that people can gain a full understanding of the impacts of business activities and how we can and must do better to support people and our planet.

Our Common Agenda

Fifth, now is the time to think for the **long term**, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead.... We also need to be better prepared to prevent and respond to major global risks.

Trust and trustworthiness

- States must trust that decisions are really taken in the common interest
- People must trust that their human rights will be protected
- Everyone able to develop their full potential to contribute to society
- Governments must be trustworthy
- Everything founded on justice for all
- Sacrifices should be shared equitably
- No one should be left behind

Obstacles on the pathway to peace

Humanity is gripped by a crisis of identity, as various peoples and groups struggle to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, they fall into competing ideologies and power struggles. Seemingly countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

The pathway to peace

Consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Bahá'í expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

The tortuous pathway to peace

Today, many of the dominant currents in societies everywhere are pushing people apart, not drawing them together. Even as global poverty of the most extreme form has decreased, political and economic systems have enabled the enrichment of small coteries with grossly exorbitant wealth—a condition that fuels fundamental instability in world affairs. The interactions of the individual citizen, governing institutions, and society as a whole are often fraught, as those arguing for the primacy of one or the other show more and more intransigence in their thinking. Religious fundamentalism is warping the character of communities, even nations. The failings of so many organizations and institutions of society have understandably led to a decline in public trust, but this has been systematically exploited by vested interests seeking to undermine the credibility of all sources of knowledge.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

The tortuous pathway to peace

Certain shared ethical principles, which seemed to be in the ascendant at the start of this century, are eroded, threatening the prevailing consensus about right and wrong that, in various arenas, had succeeded in holding humanity's basest tendencies in check. And the will to engage in international collective action, which twenty years ago represented a powerful strain of thinking among world leaders, has been cowed, assailed by resurgent forces of racism, nationalism, and factionalism.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

The tortuous pathway to peace

Thus do the forces of disintegration regroup and gain ground. So be it. The unification of humanity is unstoppable by any human force; the promises made by the prophets of old and by the Author of the Cause of God Himself testify to this truth. Yet the course humanity takes to achieve its destiny may very well be tortuous. The tumult raised by the contending peoples of the earth threatens to drown out the voices of those noble-minded souls in every society who call for an end to conflict and struggle. As long as that call goes unheeded, there is no reason to doubt that the world's current state of disorder and confusion will worsen—possibly with catastrophic consequences—until a chastened humanity sees fit to take another significant step, perhaps this time decisive, towards enduring peace.

Global Governance?

Our world is increasingly globalized and interconnected, but there is no effective mechanism for governance, law and collaboration at the scale of global challenges and catastrophic risks, whether economic, social or environmental, as called for in the World Order of Baha'u'llah.

How can we contribute to the discourse on global governance?

Discourses related to peace

The friends are also developing their capacity for engaging those around them, regardless of creed, culture, class, or ethnicity, in conversations about how to bring about spiritual and material well-being through systematic application of the divine teachings. One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society; in certain countries, leaders and thinkers striving to address the challenges confronting their societies increasingly show appreciation for the perspectives offered by Bahá'ís. These contributions articulate insights derived from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, draw on the experience being generated by the believers around the world, and aim to elevate the discussion above the acrimony and contention that so often prevent discourses of society from progressing.

Discourses related to peace

Further, the ideas and lines of reasoning advanced by Bahá'ís are reinforced by their practice of consultation. Sensitized as they are to the importance of harmony and the fruitlessness of conflict, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh seek to cultivate those conditions that are most conducive to the emergence of unity in any setting. We are heartened to see the believers expanding their efforts to participate in the discourses of society—especially those friends who, in their professional capacity, are able to contribute to discourses directly related to peace.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

Global Governance

The background of the slide is an abstract painting. It features a central, bright yellow figure that resembles a stylized human or a creature, possibly a lion or a bear, standing on a green base. The surrounding colors are a mix of blues, greens, and reds, creating a textured, painterly effect. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive.

A Bahá'í vision of ways forward

World Order ¹

The **unity of the human race**, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a **world commonwealth** in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ²

This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a **world legislature**, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the **entire resources** of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world **executive**, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world **tribunal** will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ³

A mechanism of world **intercommunication** will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world **metropolis** will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world **language** will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ⁴

In such a world society, **science** and **religion**, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. The **press** will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The **economic resources** of the world will be organized, its sources of **raw materials** will be tapped and fully utilized, its **markets** will be coordinated and developed, and the **distribution** of its products will be equitably regulated.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ⁵

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ⁶

The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on **war**, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to increase the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected **resources of the planet**, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

World Order ⁷

A world **federal system**, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of **energy** on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation - such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

The promise of world peace

Beloved friends: The devoted efforts that you and your like-minded collaborators are making to build communities founded on spiritual principles, to apply those principles for the betterment of your societies, and to offer the insights arising—these are the surest ways you can hasten the fulfilment of the promise of world peace.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Baha'is of the World 18 January 2019 https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20190118_001/)

An example of public discourse

Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century

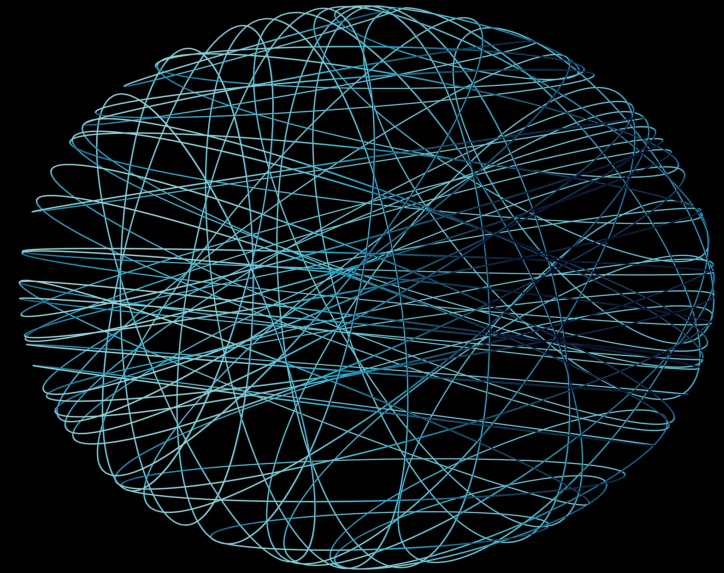
Augusto Lopez-Claros
Arthur L. Dahl
Maja Groff

Cambridge University Press, January 2020

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-governance-and-the-emergence-of-global-institutions-for-the-21st-century/AF7D40B152C4CBEDB310EC5F40866A59>

Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century

Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl
and Maja Groff



CAMBRIDGE

The approach

- effective governance requires legislative, executive and judicial functions
- nations will only give up right to make war in exchange for effective mechanisms of collective security and peaceful settlement of disputes
- gradual development of relevant international institutions and processes
- build confidence in their effectiveness in reducing national insecurity
- carefully coordinated disarmament
- trust that justice will be done
- States also have to become trustworthy
- collective sense of moral responsibility



If you are interested to know more

International Environment Forum

<https://iefworld.org>

Global Governance Forum

<https://globalgovernanceforum.org/>

Climate Governance Commission

<https://globalchallenges.org/initiatives/partnerships/climate-governance-commission/>

Some references on peace

'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets to The Hague*: First Tablet to The Hague – 17 December 1919, Second Tablet to The Hague – 1 July 1920

Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* 1985

Universal House of Justice, *To the Bahá'ís of the World*, 18 January 2019

Questions for discussion

Is there community participation in local decision-making?

Are there local groups concerned about the United Nations and global governance?

How can concern about the war in Europe open doors for meaningful conversations?

Do you see opportunities for discourses related to peace?