

One Planet, One Habitation

*A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's
Relationship with the Natural World*

Bahá'í International Community

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Summary of the main themes

One Homeland

*This span of earth is but one homeland
and one habitation.*

*It behooveth you to abandon vainglory
which causeth alienation
and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony*

— Bahá'u'lláh

The Natural World

The natural world, in all its wonder, shows us the meaning of interdependence. From the biosphere as a whole to the smallest microorganism, it demonstrates how dependent any one life-form is on numerous others—and how imbalances in one system affect the interconnected whole.

The Natural World

Humanity is dependent on this greater system, but while the human race has never had more power to shape the physical world on planetary scales, this very power, when not considered carefully and ignoring the present and future common good, is having worldwide and potentially irreversible consequences.

The Natural World

As the grave effects of overshooting planetary limits become increasingly apparent, from climate change to biodiversity loss to environmental degradation and pollution, humanity must develop more collaborative and constructive relationships between its peoples and with the natural environment.

The Natural World

Today we need action far more rapidly and on much wider scales, changing the organization and operation of human affairs. The question before the nations and leaders of the world is whether the needed action will be taken as a matter of conscious choice and prevention, or whether it will be caused by destruction and suffering from environmental breakdown.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §4)

The need for a systems perspective

Our activities must reflect the fact that the wealth and wonders of the earth are the **common heritage** of all people, who deserve **just and equitable access** to its resources. Our choices must evince an intergenerational perspective in which the well-being of **future inhabitants** is taken into account at all levels of decision-making. And in this turbulent period of human history, our activities must increasingly be tempered by the **wisdom and judgment** that come with growing maturity. (Trusteeship)

Service to the common good

*Is there any deed in the world that
would be nobler than service to the
common good?*

... No, by the Lord God!

— Bahá'í holy writings

One people in one global homeland

Seen from the whole planet, humanity is one people living in one global homeland. Consciousness of this oneness, applying justice, is the only foundation on which sustainable societies can be raised.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §5)

One people in one global homeland

Every people, in its own way, celebrates the beauty and abundance of nature. The traditions of every culture recognize this priceless heritage that sustains our physical and spiritual needs. Building a sustainable world will bring unity both in shared effort and joyful celebration.

One people in one global homeland

Humanity's oneness includes variations of expression, culture, or social organization, which we call unity in diversity. In the natural world, systems also depend on many species to function and be resilient.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §7)

One people in one global homeland

In human affairs, diversity of thought, background, and approach are similarly important. Truth comes through the interaction of diverse perspectives and experiences. Too many similar views and opinions can lead to dangers and breakdown.

One people in one global homeland

The contributions of many more peoples are needed to rebalance our relationship with the natural world.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §9)

One people in one global homeland

Presuming that one group is superior to another, along lines of nationality, race, wealth, or any other characteristic, prevents consensus and coordinated action, and undermines motivation to work for the common good, either social or ecological.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §9)

Building capacity

All of the earth's inhabitants deserve the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of a global society advancing in **harmony with the natural world**. To create such a society, people everywhere must be empowered to **participate** in the constructive processes that will give rise to it. Building **capacity** in **individuals, communities, and institutions** to contribute effectively to transformational change is therefore an indispensable element of effective environmental action.

(Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Building capacity

For the **individual**, this implies developing a range of interrelated **capacities**—scientific, technical, social, moral, and spiritual. Individuals must be endowed with an understanding of concepts, knowledge of facts, and mastery of methods, as well as the skills, attitudes, and qualities required to establish more healthy and sustainable patterns of individual and collective life.

(Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Building capacity

In terms of local **communities**, capacity building involves the enrichment and conscious shaping of **culture**. On the community rests the challenge of creating a milieu in which individual wills blend together, in which powers are multiplied and manifest themselves in **collective effort**, and in which higher expressions of the **human spirit** are demonstrated in new ways of arranging the affairs of society.

(Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Building capacity

Attention must also be paid to strengthening organizational structures. **Institutions** with capacity are needed at every level that can act as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals and groups can be expressed in **service** to the common good.

(Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

New bases for human happiness

We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end.

— Bahá'í holy writings

Consensus in action

Moving humanity to a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with the natural world will require strong agreement and collective will around key principles for the affairs of the international community such as stewardship, interdependence, and justice.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §12)

Consensus in action

The gap between words and actions shows that principles related to sustainability do not yet shape the choices and behaviors of nations.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §13)

Consensus in action

We need deeds, not words. Commitment to key principles and values can help societies move past limited or self-serving interests.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §14)

Consensus in action

Action must be made coherent with principles that are collectively embraced and championed by all. The international order must facilitate planetary responses to planetary challenges.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §15)

Poverty shall disappear

The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, that everyone, as far as possible ... shall share in comfort and well-being.

— Bahá'í holy writings

Redefining progress

To fix humanity's relationship with the natural world, we need to redefine ideas of progress, civilization, and development. What are the qualities by which a person, nation, or corporation are judged successful? For what are they commended and appreciated?

Redefining progress

So long as our values prioritize possessions over relationships or acquisition over responsibility, and we expect infinite growth on a finite planet, a sustainable world will remain out of reach.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §18)

Redefining progress

Such values affect the human spirit, leading to excess, exploitation, and depletion, with extremes of wealth and poverty. Progress must be understood in new terms.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §18)

Redefining progress

No country is an example of sustainable development. We thought development was industrialization, technological capacity, and macroeconomic growth, but these leave many dissatisfied and in difficulty, while numerous other populations around the world face injustices.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §19)

Redefining progress

No one pattern of life and vision of society can be taken as the model for all of humanity.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §19)

Redefining progress

Redefining progress requires an expanded understanding of ourselves as a species, including truths about the human spirit itself.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §20)

Redefining progress

The simplistic materialistic assumption that views the individual as a purely self-interested economic unit, competing with others to accumulate an ever-greater share of the world's material resources, still underlies the global order.

Redefining progress

A more accurate understanding of human nature would include qualities such as trustworthiness, mutual support, commitment to truth, and a sense of responsibility, that are the building blocks of a stable social order, ensuring that our pursuit of prosperity includes the many other aspects of individual and collective well-being.

Redefining progress

Redefining progress could include new approaches to ownership and usership, new forms of urban organization, new methods of agriculture, power generation, and transportation, with vast possibilities before humanity.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §22)

Redefining progress

People and the planet need to be valued as explicitly today as profit and economic gain have been in the past.... Basic notions of **progress, development, and prosperity** will need to be recast in far more holistic terms.

(Rethinking economic arrangements)

Religion and Science

*Religion and science are the two wings
upon which man's intelligence
can soar into the heights,
with which the human soul can progress.*

— Bahá'í holy writings

Aligning with higher principles

Humanity's existence is governed not only by physical forces, but also by social and moral laws of cause and effect.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §24)

Aligning with higher principles

Greed is inherently corrosive to the common good, no matter how artfully justified or concealed. Acts of selfless compassion invariably hold the power to motivate and inspire, no matter how seemingly simple or isolated.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §24)

Aligning with higher principles

The path to a more harmonious relationship with nature, beyond technological adjustment, must involve communities and societies learning to live by higher principles.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §25)

Aligning with higher principles

Religious teachings can unlock the high-minded qualities latent in every individual, creating communities that are actively putting transcendent values into practice for the betterment of all.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §26)

Aligning with higher principles

“Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches,” says Bahá’u’lláh, an example of values transcending material prosperity alone that can help the environmental movement and humanity as a whole.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §27)

Spiritual principles

The **spiritual principles** animating the world's enduring religions have aided individuals and entire populations to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and the nature of the good life and the good society. When true to these ideals, **religion** has provided a bulwark against ideologies of materialism that would reduce human beings to mere resources to be exploited or consumers to be satiated. At its highest, religion has not only raised the call to virtues such as integrity, good character, high resolve, cooperation, and sacrificial endeavor, but drawn growing numbers together around such principles, unifying disparate elements, and giving rise to **cohesive communities** working to manifest high ideals in practice.

(Complementary systems of knowledge and practice)

Justice

*The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice;
turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me,
and neglect it not that I may confide in thee.
By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes
and not through the eyes of others,
and shalt know of thine own knowledge
and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor.*

--- Bahá'u'lláh

Justice as process and outcome

Justice is central to oneness at a planetary level. There are profound injustices to people and planet in the widespread suffering resulting from humanity's extractive relationship with the natural world, when a select few benefit from excessive use of the earth's resources while hurting many others, when immediate desires take away from the basic needs of future generations.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §29)

Justice as process and outcome

Correcting such ills will require honesty, creativity, perseverance, and humility. Decision-making must include the voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order, drawing on insights of populations and indigenous peoples living in harmony with the natural world, and creating more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.

Justice as process and outcome

Justice demands that the benefits of human civilization be distributed with equity, and that responsibility for undertaking necessary transitions reflect historic contributions to the present climate crisis. We also need just processes.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At the individual level, justice calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments and equity in one's treatment of others. At the group level, it is the awareness that the interests of the individual and those of society are closely linked.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

It also requires seeking truth far beyond present patterns of negotiation and compromise, using a process of consultation and decision-making that is principled, open, and fact-based.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §31)

Justice as process and outcome

At all levels, the capacity to manifest justice—and commitment to doing so—must be strengthened. Just and equitable relationships are the foundation for any unified global movement for the common good.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §32)

Embracing the Role of the State

Numerous actors have a part to play in building a more sustainable world. Local communities can do much to foster collective action.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

Youth demonstrate an openness to new ways of organizing society, a willingness to learn through front-line action, and a readiness to commit themselves to high endeavors and the well-being of future generations.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

Business and industry can make constructive decisions whose benefits affect societies across the globe.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

The role of national government, however, is unique today, where the nation-state is one of the fundamental units of the global political order. States therefore have an indispensable role in addressing transnational environmental challenges.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

Embracing the Role of the State

Effective governance helps all within a jurisdiction for generations to come.

The state is also responsible for governing the commons and public goods, whether within its own borders or in collaboration with other institutions beyond them.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §35)

Embracing the Role of the State

Remaking entire industries across various sectors of society is the work of decades, involving vast financial resources, jobs, and physical infrastructure.

Governments must develop long-term plans, creating the conditions for the necessary advances.

Embracing the Role of the State

Establishing new qualities and attitudes toward leadership will be essential, if states are to effectively address environmental concerns.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §38)

Embracing the Role of the State

Personal character is central, requiring leaders with moral courage approaching public service as a responsibility and not a path to personal gain, demonstrating accountability to ends higher than electoral victory or personal advancement, and taking decisions that are difficult but aligned with the greater good.

Embracing the Role of the State

Pessimism about the role of the state has grown when rules and standards are determined by vested interests; when services have been privatized in ways that subordinate human well-being to the profit motive; when political corruption and expediency have sacrificed the common good to personal advantage.

Embracing the Role of the State

Good governance allows the power of action to be unlocked both for individual initiative and collective volition.

Good governance creates the context in which the private sector, the scientific community, civil society, and others can make their highest contributions.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §40)

Knowledge for ascent

*Knowledge is as wings to man's life,
and a ladder for his ascent.
Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.*

— Bahá'í holy writings

The world that calls us

Everyone can play a part in building a more sustainable world. Local communities can do much for collective action using the innovative capacities of their members.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

The world that calls us

Youth consistently demonstrate an openness to new ways of organizing society, a willingness to learn through front-line action, and a readiness to commit themselves to high endeavors and the well-being of future generations.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §34)

The world that calls us

A flourishing global civilization in harmony with the natural environment is our vision. This world is one of integration and balance, beauty, and maturity.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §42)

The world that calls us

It is a world with a redefined sense of progress, filled with communities and individuals working together with the support of institutions toward the realization of their highest hopes. It is a world without the destructive moral compromises—social, economic, and environmental—too often seen as necessary to progress.

The world that calls us

Movement toward this vision has begun, with high ambitions and calls for action. Yet the transformation is too slow. The longer we wait, the harder it will be.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §43)

The world that calls us

Will humanity act on the truth that its own destiny and that of the planet are irrevocably linked? Or will still greater calamities be required to move it to action?

(based on *One Planet – One Habitation* §43)

The world that calls us

The gulf between words and action is a central challenge. Yet far stronger consensus and collective will among the nations is needed around the values demanded by the current stage of humanity's development, putting those values into practice for the common good and discarding whatever stands in the way.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §44)

The world that calls us

This is a high endeavor indeed, to leave a priceless legacy for future generations. Let us join together in rising to its demands.

(based on One Planet – One Habitation §44)

Source

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