

South Africa, 23 May 2008

Bahá'í community of South Africa

Acknowledging the social, political and economic circumstances of South Africa in no way detracts from the point that xenophobia is a socially, morally and spiritually moribund concept. There is only one human race, a single people inhabiting the planet Earth, one human family bound together in a common destiny, a single entity created from one same substance obligated to "be even as one soul".

Recognition of this reality is the antidote to racism, xenophobia and intolerance in all its forms. Bahá'ís believe it should, accordingly, be the guiding principle behind the discussions, deliberations and decisions as the country grapples with bringing about the reality of the oneness of the human race.

A proper understanding of the oneness of humanity has the capacity to carry us in South Africa, and all humanity, not merely past racism, racial and ethnic prejudice, and xenophobia but also beyond intermediate notions of tolerance or multi-culturalism - concepts that are important stepping-stones to humanity's long sought goal of building a peaceful, just and unified world but insufficient for the eradication of such deeply rooted afflictions. In this context the Bahá'í Writings call on the individual "Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind."

At a collective level it "implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world – 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, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

Justice must be the ruling principle of social organization, a corollary principle that calls for widespread measures on the part of governments, their agencies, and civil society to address economic injustice at all levels. Issues of xenophobia in relation to contemporary problems of minority diasporas, the uneven application of citizenship laws, and refugee resettlement can likewise best be addressed in the light of humanity's oneness.

The principle of the oneness of humanity exposes any attempt to distinguish separate "races" or "peoples" in the contemporary world as artificial and misleading. While racial, national and/or ethnic heritage can be considered as sources of pride and even a backdrop for positive social development, such distinctions should not become a basis for new forms of separation or superiority, however subtle.

From the Bahá'í Writings, "O Children of Men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest."

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