

Bahá'í International Community Statement
at the 36th session of the
Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities

Geneva - 17 August 1983
(5th meeting)

*Agenda item 5: Elimination of Racial
discrimination - (a) Measures to combat
racism and racial discrimination and
the role of the Sub-Commission*

BP000401



The eradication of racial discrimination is, of course, a matter of the highest importance, and the Bahá'í International Community welcomes the opportunity of speaking under agenda item 5 and of offering its views on this subject and its suggestions as to measures that might be taken by the Sub-Commission and other international bodies in order to combat, and finally eliminate, racism and racial discrimination.

The promotion of racial unity and the elimination of all forms of racial division and dissension are fundamental goals of the Bahá'í Faith. In the Bahá'í view, every human being, whatever his race, colour or ethnic origin, is a valued and uniquely contributing member of society. Bahá'ís therefore recognize and uphold the equality of all men and women from every one of the world's vast diversity of racial and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, Bahá'ís believe that all people share common spiritual and human bonds that transcend racial and ethnic differences and - above all else - the Bahá'í International Community strives to promote and strengthen these bonds, in recognition of the fundamental, organic oneness of the human race.

The pervasive problem of racial discrimination arises, we believe, from failure to recognize the essential unity of all the peoples of the world. Like so many other grave social problems, it has its roots in blind prejudice. Consequently, the problem of racial discrimination must be addressed at its source - the human heart. What is required to eliminate racial prejudice is proper education in the principle - and the truth - of the organic oneness of mankind. This education should, in our view, be directed towards the development, in adults, in youth and in children - especially young children - of an inner awareness and consciousness of the fundamental human bonds shared by all human beings, whatever their race or colour.

At the 35th session of the Sub-Commission, during the discussion on racial discrimination and the report of Mr. Justice Chowdhury, a number of

speakers emphasized the importance of education in combating racism and racial discrimination. The view was then expressed - and we wholeheartedly agree - that enlightened legislation is, by itself, insufficient to eradicate racial discrimination, and that such legislation must be complemented by educational programmes aimed at nurturing tolerance and understanding in the hearts and minds of children.

This view has been expressed in numerous resolutions, declarations and conventions adopted by international bodies, including the Final Document of the 1978 Vienna Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights, the 1973 Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and, most recently, the Programme of Action adopted by the Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. All of these have stressed the important role of education in eliminating racial discrimination.

The Bahá'í International Community fully supports the spirit of these recommendations and instruments and believes that positive action must now be taken to develop and implement educational programmes directed towards the elimination of racial prejudice. We believe, however, that it is vital that these programmes have as their focus the development of a consciousness of the unity of mankind. Simply studying the problem of racial discrimination will not change human attitudes.

In accordance with these views, we proposed at the Second World Conference the development of a model curriculum on the organic oneness of mankind - a curriculum which could be adopted and, where necessary, adapted by governments. Specifically, we suggested that this curriculum should include study of the following:

1. the biological unity of the human race as one human species
2. the basic human needs, desires and emotions shared by all human beings
3. the universal need for self-identity

4. the universal institution of the family as the basic unit of society
5. the universal need to belong to and participate in the life of a larger community, and to develop a sense of cultural identity
6. the social, economic, cultural and political interdependence of all peoples, and
7. man's universal need and search for spiritual purpose through religion.

In the examination of each of these points, cultural differences can be studied and appreciated as different expressions and manifestations of the same universal human characteristics and needs.

In addition to these basic topics, the following subjects might also be included in the model curriculum:

1. understanding how racial prejudice grows out of a failure to perceive the bonds uniting all peoples
2. the importance of contact with people of other races as a means of breaking down prejudices and perceiving shared human bonds
3. the different forms and manifestations of racial prejudice in our everyday lives, and
4. United Nations action in the field of human rights and the human rights standards already established by the United Nations.

We presume that UNESCO would be the most appropriate agency for the elaboration of such a model curriculum, on the basis of its past efforts aimed at developing model educational programmes as well as its general mandate in the field of education for human rights.

The Bahá'í International Community is convinced that the development and implementation of a curriculum on the oneness of mankind, oriented towards the earliest stages of development of the child's personality, offers a realistic hope for progress towards the goal of

eliminating racial prejudice. We therefore suggest that the Sub-Commission should recommend to the appropriate United Nations bodies and agencies the development of such a programme. Such a step would, we believe, respond to the spirit of action emerging from the Second World Conference - a spirit which, we hope, signals a renewed determination on the part of the international community to deal forthrightly with the continuing problem of racial prejudice and racial discrimination.

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