

THE PROSPERITY OF HUMANKIND

Bahá'í International Community

Office of Public Information 1995

Part II - Justice

in simplified language

Prosperity of Humankind - 3

Justice

Justice is the one power that can turn the growing consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective desire to build the necessary structures of global community life. As the people of the world increasingly access information of every kind and diverse ideas, justice will become the ruling principle of successful social organisation. Proposals for the development of the planet will have to submit to the standards required by justice.

Justice for the individual

For the individual, justice enables the human soul of each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh says, Justice is "*the best beloved of all things*" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbour or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgements, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus always with us in our daily life.

Justice at the group level

At the group level, justice is the essential guide to collective decision making, because it is the only way to achieve unity of thought and action. Far from the past association of justice with punishment, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, for human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society go together.

Justice at the group level

As justice guides our human interactions, we learn to consult without passion about options to be examined and to select appropriate courses of action. In this way our old habits of taking sides and manipulating are far less likely to interfere with decision-making.

Defining progress

This will deeply impact social and economic development. In defining progress, concern for justice protects us from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of all of humankind -- and even of the planet itself -- to the ways new technologies benefit a wealthy few. In design and planning, it makes sure that limited resources do not go to projects outside a community's essential social or economic priorities.

Defining progress

Above all, only development programmes that are seen as meeting their needs and as being just and equitable can earn the commitment of the masses of humanity necessary for implementation. To achieve our demanding collective goals requires relevant human qualities such as honesty, a willingness to work, and a spirit of co-operation. For this, every member of society -- indeed every group within society -- must trust that they are protected by standards and promised benefits that apply equally to all.

Development
for everyone



Human rights at the centre

This puts human rights at the centre of a strategy of social and economic development, a strategy that promotes human rights freed from false opposing ideas. Concern that each human being should enjoy freedom of thought and action for his or her personal growth does not justify the individualism that corrupts many areas of contemporary life.

Human rights at the centre

Nor does concern to ensure the welfare of society as a whole require making the state the only source of humanity's well-being. Recent history shows all too clearly that such ideologies and political agendas have worked against the interests they claim to serve. Only through consultation founded in the organic unity of humankind can the concern for human rights find full expression.

United Nations and human rights

Today, the United Nations has the task of promoting human rights free from those who would exploit it. It was born out of two world wars and world-wide economic breakdown. The term "human rights" only came into general use in the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. These history-making documents recognise respect for social justice as part of establishing of world peace. The Declaration passed without a dissenting vote in the General Assembly, giving it an authority that has grown steadily since.



UN Human Rights Council

The freedom to know

The consciousness that distinguishes human nature includes our individual exploration of reality. We must protect our freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the gifts of human nature to achieve this. Human beings must be free to know. This is true even if often abused in society today.

Freedoms

This distinguishing feature of human consciousness provides the moral justification for many of the rights defined in the Universal Declaration and its Covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, and the opportunity to participate in political life are all rights that must be guaranteed by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

Trusteeship

Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each of us is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship (or responsibility) is the moral foundation of other economic and social rights which the United Nations is defining. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all part of such a trusteeship. The community has obligations for the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and many other reasonable expectations.



Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Cultural diversity

This collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that the culture essential to his or her identity is protected under national and international law. Just as the biological life of humankind and its environment depend on a diverse gene pool, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is essential to the social and economic development of a human race collectively coming-of-age.

Cultural diversity

This heritage must bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from elimination by the present materialistic society. On the other, cultures must be encouraged to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of partisan political manipulation.

Justice and unity

"The light of men", Bahá'u'lláh says, "is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance."

Universal
House of
Justice

