

The Nine Year Plan 2022-2031

Participating in Public Discourse

Learning about the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Class - NineYearPlan5

What is Discourse?

The capacity to enter into uplifting and meaningful conversations with others

Discourses of society or public discourses are structured conversations in which numerous people participate in a variety of social spaces

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

Closely connected with the capacity for engaging in social action is a capacity for contributing to the discourses of society. At heart, this is simply a capacity for participating in a conversation about a matter that affects people's lives and offering a perspective grounded in Bahá'í principles and Bahá'í experience.

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

Viewed in this way, it is a skill which many Bahá'ís have the opportunity to practise almost daily, for instance in their studies or occupations, and which is cultivated through involvement in institute courses; in its more formal expression, it is central to the work of the Bahá'í International Community and national Offices of External Affairs.



Bahá'í International Community at Climate Conference in 2023



United Kingdom commemorating 100 years of Bahá'í Assembly

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

...in relation to the release of the society-building power of the Faith at the grassroots, it is a capacity that comes into greater demand as closer association with a population, brought about through the work of expansion and consolidation, leads to increased consciousness of an area's prevailing social problems, as well as of the aspirations of its people to overcome them.



Our Story is One, commemorating women martyrs in Iran

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[the sacrifices of the 10] have inspired a new generation of women who refuse to be silenced and are willing to endure great hardships to live in a more prosperous and just Iran. The story of the resilience of Iranian women in the face of persecution is a shared one, transcending boundaries of faith and background.

Five women Nobel Prize Laureates



Our Story is One, commemorating women martyrs in Iran



Our Story is One, commemorating women martyrs in Iran

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

As the number of those participating in community-building activities rises, so does the need for the Bahá'í community to offer, as a unified body, its considered perspective on obstacles to social progress and on issues that weigh on the minds and spirits of those with whom it interacts.

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

As the contribution being made by the Faith to the progress of society in different parts of the world gains greater visibility, the Bahá'í community will increasingly be called upon to explicate the principles it advocates, and to demonstrate their applicability to the issues facing humanity.

(Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021, §27)



Bahá'í International Community, New York, future of work

Public discourse in the 9-year plan

The more the intellectual life of a community blossoms and thrives, the greater its capacity to answer this call. It will be up to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh to provide, in the world of ideas, the intellectual rigour and clarity of thought to match their commitment to spiritual and material progress in the world of deeds.

30 YEARS

THE BAHÁ'Í CHAIR
FOR WORLD PEACE



Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, University of Maryland, USA

The Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In 1875, Bahá'u'lláh asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá to write a book to encourage Persia (now Iran) to become a modern nation on Bahá'í principles without mentioning the Faith: *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

The Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in the West 1911-1913, He gave many public talks on diverse subjects relating Bahá'í principles to the issues of the day. They are a model of public discourse



'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking in Chicago 1912

International Bahá'í Bureau

The International Bahá'í Bureau was established in Geneva in 1925 and was recognized by the League of Nations. It operated under the direct supervision of Shoghi Effendi.

Bahá'í International Community

The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Offices represent the worldwide Bahá'í community at the UN and in other international fora, including those organized by global civil society. The BIC has regional representation in Geneva, Brussels, Addis Ababa, and Jakarta.



Bahá'í International Community, New York Office

Bahá'í International Community

The UN Offices contribute to discourses at the international level. They seek to promote a culture of cooperation and collaboration through principled and constructive interactions with diplomats, UN officials, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, and others.



Bahá'í International Community, Jakarta Office, Bali meeting

Bahá'í International Community

They are committed to joining with others in the collective search for more effective ways to address problems of global concern.

Bahá'í International Community

Within the context of the UN, the BIC is recognized as an international NGO, with affiliates in over 180 countries and territories, which together represent a cross-section of humanity.

Bahá'í International Community

The Office registered with the UN as an NGO recognized by the Department of Public Information in 1948 and, in 1970, was granted Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Bahá'í International Community

The BIC engages with the UN, its member states, as well as with inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. BIC delegates from around the world have participated in major UN conferences and international gatherings such as those related to gender equality, human rights, as well as social and sustainable development.



Bahá'í International Community, UN Commission on the Status of Women

Contribution to public discourse

The friends are... 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.

Contribution to public discourse

One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society.

(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/)

Contribution to public discourse

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.



Building unity in the Middle East

Contribution to public discourse

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/)

Local public discourse

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010, §25)

Local public discourse

Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.

Local public discourse

...every human being and every group of individuals, irrespective of whether they are counted among His followers, can take inspiration from His teachings, benefiting from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge will aid them in addressing the challenges they face.

Local public discourse

Indeed, the civilization that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010, §26)



House of Deputies commemorates 100 years of the Faith in Brazil

Local public discourse

Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of... the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010, §26)

Local public discourse

At the level of the cluster, involvement in public discourse can range from an act as simple as introducing Bahá'í ideas into everyday conversation to more formal activities such as the preparation of articles and attendance at gatherings, dedicated to themes of social concern—climate change and the environment, governance and human rights, to mention a few.

Local public discourse

It entails, as well, meaningful interactions with civic groups and local organizations in villages and neighbourhoods.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010, §30)

Preparing for public discourse

In 2013, the Universal House of Justice created the Office of Public Discourse at the Bahá'í World Centre to share experience and learning around the world

Preparing for public discourse

... be increasingly involved in the life of society, knowing well that the enormous global transformation envisioned by Baha'u'llah will not come about through the endeavors of Baha'is alone.

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Preparing for public discourse

How do we go about understanding and analyzing issues of social import in light of the Baha'i teachings? How did I develop the perception I have of this or that issue?

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Preparing for public discourse

To what extent are my views on social issues influenced by informal conversations with friends, neighbors, and co-workers?

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Preparing for public discourse

Given that I am constantly exposed to a wide range of convincing arguments, often stemming from conflicting ideological perspectives, each aggressively propagated by the media, how do I go about separating truth from propaganda? What criteria do I use to distinguish between facts and opinion?

Preparing for public discourse

How do I avoid presenting as the Baha'i view on a particular issue a set of ideas in vogue that are superficially akin to certain beliefs of the Faith?

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)

Preparing for public discourse

- Independent investigation of truth and reality
- Certitude in Baha'u'llah's revelation
- Avoiding extreme relativism and fanaticism
- Humility, our understanding far from complete

Preparing for public discourse

- Continually gain fresh insights into spiritual and social reality
- Pursue knowledge with others, towards unity of thought
- Make distinction between dogma, superstition and prejudice, and the truth
- Reality or truth is one

(Ruhi Book 14: Participating in public discourse)