



Recommendations of the
Bahá'í Community of Malaysia
to the
National Unity Blueprint

THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF MALAYSIA

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Dear Sirs/Madams,

Recommendations of the Bahá'í Community of Malaysia to the National Unity Blueprint

WE ARE ONE - This is the aspiration of the people of our nation today.

All across the nation, we see young and old, women and men, civil society and the government engaged in this critical national discourse. That the people of all walks of life have become actively engaged in determining the direction of our nation is a turning point for national unity.

The Bahá'í Community of Malaysia, whose members come from a cross-section of society, is moved to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the issues before us. We do so because of our sense of shared responsibility and our hope for this blessed nation—a nation founded upon the principles of unity, justice and equity as enshrined in the Constitution and 'Rukun Negara'.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith declares: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." This implies that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind is its unification. However, to this day, we find many still take the opposite view: they look upon unity as an ultimate, almost unattainable goal and rather concentrate on remedying all the other ills of mankind, which are but various symptoms and side effects of disunity.

The Bahá'í Community believes that in the face of difficult situations such as this faced by our nation at this juncture, it may be useful to identify relevant principles to guide our collective way forward before launching into action plans. These principles will serve as street lights to ensure unity of thoughts by all parties concerned to guide the implementation phase. We believe the essential principles such as the following should guide us in the search for national unity: The Oneness of Mankind, Justice, Consultation, Equality, Empowerment, and Education. These principles are elaborated on pages 7 to 9 of this document.

In this light, the Bahá'í Community of Malaysia would like to submit the following recommendations under the following four main headings for the consideration of the Council:

1. Education
2. Community/Neighbourhood
3. Legislation
4. Media

1. Education

Set out below are two excerpts on education from Bahá'í Holy Writings:

“The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.”

“There are two kinds of education: divine and material. The philosophers who have arisen are material teachers, have given the people material training and have been the cause of the progress of the world of nature. But the holy Manifestations of God are divine educators. The philosophers have educated the world of bodies; the divine, holy Manifestations have trained souls.”

Bahá'í Writings stress that an educational curriculum should instil in our children:

- the recognition of the diversity and essential oneness of humankind and provide them the training needed to live a fruitful life of service to their country and indeed to all of humanity;
- the realization that it is chiefly service to humanity and dedication to the unification of mankind that unlock individual capacity and release creative powers latent in human nature; and
- a firm conviction that human honour and happiness lie in self-respect and noble purpose, in integrity and moral quality, and not in the mere pursuit of wealth and power for their own sake.

Based on the above, we set out below our recommendations:

The Malaysian education system should be re-examined to incorporate a curriculum that builds capacity in our children to take part in community planning and action as determined yet humble participants who help overcome conflict and division and contribute to the establishment of a spirit of unity and collaboration. Hence, the following should form an integral part of the education curriculum beyond the focus on skills of reading, writing, and simple arithmetic.

- a) An appreciation of the rich history and perspective of civilization and the unifying forces that contribute to the advancement of civilization rather than focusing on differing ideologies as well as on the wars and events that divide humanity;
- b) Promote inter-faith and inter-ethnic studies through actual engagement of our children in diverse community initiatives, including interaction with minority groups as well as visits to all religious places of worship;
- c) Instil a high sense of justice in our children so that they may be fair and may strive to provide for the comfort of all and that each member of humanity may pass his/her life in comfort and welfare. In this regard, a disposition to analyse and a desire to understand the features of different forms of government, law, and public administration is critical. Constitutional literacy should thus be incorporated as a core subject to provide basic knowledge of the rights of the individual and communities enshrined in the Constitution of our country. Additionally, our

schools should devote sustained and systematic attention to civic education to promote civic-mindedness;

- d) In the spirit of world citizenship, promote greater unity by eliminating stereotyping based on religion, culture, race, class, ethnicity and nationality in the curricula; and
- e) Develop the capacity for intellectual investigation as an indispensable instrument for successful community action as well as the capacity to analyse social conditions and discover the forces that have caused them, and a corresponding ability to express ideas, so as to be able to contribute to consultation on community problems. In this regard, science and religion should be seen as two systems of knowledge which have together contributed towards the development of civilizations.

2. Community/Neighbourhoods

Set out below are two excerpts on the role of the individual in community building from the Bahá'í Holy Writings:

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

“And the honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight....How excellent, how honourable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man’s, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavour in the arena of civilization and justice.”

The Bahá'í community's commitment to community building and unity is rooted in our sacred scriptures. Fundamental to our belief is the conviction that every person, every people, every nation has a part to play in building a peaceful and prosperous global society. Bahá'ís throughout the country are thus actively engaged in community and neighbourhood initiatives, armed with the conviction that everyone of us must arise to demonstrate through words and deeds that indeed we are one human family.

Based on the above, we set out below our recommendations:

All should be encouraged to open their hearts and homes to their neighbours and friends to join in prayers and meaningful discourses on how each can foster unity in neighbourhoods and local communities;

- a) Establish neighbourhood community centres that are developed in consultation with the local community to address needs of the community. Such centres should be equipped with adequate resources with a wide range of services, facilities and programmes and all should have equitable access; and
- b) Build capacity in existing neighbourhood organizations such as Residents Associations, Rukun Tetangga groups, as well as in Town Councillors to enable effective engagement with grassroots

population and to foster a sense of community. Such neighbourhood organizations could become portals of information on policies, programmes and services offered by the Government. Regular town halls meetings could be held to share relevant information with the community as well as to consult on issues affecting the neighbourhood.

3. Legislation

Three excerpts on legislation from Bahá'í Holy Writings are set out below.

“The governments will enact these laws, establishing just legislation and economics in order that all humanity may enjoy a full measure of welfare and privilege; but this will always be according to legal protection and procedure. Without legislative administration, rights and demands fail, and the welfare of the commonwealth cannot be realized. Today the method of demand is the strike and resort to force, which is manifestly wrong and destructive of human foundations. Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations.”

“Would the setting up of just legislation, in accord with the Divine laws which guarantee the happiness of society and protect the rights of all mankind and are an impregnable proof against assault -- would such laws, insuring the integrity of the members of society and their equality before the law, inhibit their prosperity and success?”

“... If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.”

Bahá'í writings stress there should be just legislation. Legal and institutional change can be both cause and effect. Laws and institutions change as a result of new attitudes influential enough to muster the necessary legislative vote. In reverse, such change is also strongly conducive to further evolution in attitudes, both through actually enforcing new standards of behaviour and through a gradual process of altering social expectations. Laws and institutions which remain unchanged in the face of new social realities have a similar effect, but working instead in the negative direction of supporting an outdated status quo and those who wish to retard change.

Based on the above, we set out below our recommendations:

The legislation should include:

- a) responsibility for ensuring equal rights for minorities and this responsibility falls on both majorities and minorities. Majorities have a special responsibility, for the sake of justice, to bring about the social and political adjustments which will enable minorities to exercise, to the fullest extent possible, their common and fundamental rights. Minorities, on the other hand, have a moral responsibility to respond honourably to genuine efforts by majorities and recognise and respect their duties to the society at large. Both must view minority issues in the context of an increasingly interdependent world. In such a world, the advantage of the part is best served by ensuring the advantage of the whole; likewise, the whole cannot flourish when parts are oppressed or deprived. The need then is to identify the conditions which disenfranchise certain

minorities and to enact legislation which will equip these minorities to claim their just rights and will redress their grievances. Such action, however, will not be sufficient to ensure that minorities enjoy the same rights as their fellow citizens. Attitudes must change. There must be a shift in the view of majorities towards oppressed minorities, and minorities must be freed from the sense of helplessness induced by prolonged discrimination;

- b) a legal framework that will ensure that unity is upheld at all costs. Such a process at the national level, supplemented by a more widespread ratification of international instruments, most notably the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, would provide a comprehensive legal regime for combating racism and racial discrimination in our country; and
- c) severe penalties for those who incite hatred and prejudice against segments of society as legislation can facilitate changes in attitude by placing legal sanctions on such negative behaviours. By motivating people to change the way they behave, legislation can stimulate an examination of the beliefs underlying the old behaviour and consideration of the principles that support the new behaviour.

4. Media

Set out below are two excerpts on media from the Bahá'í Holy Writings.

“The media have a responsibility to help people understand that diversity need not be a source of conflict; rather, diversity can and must now serve as a resource for sustainable development. They can do so by focusing on the constructive, unifying and cooperative undertakings that prove humanity’s capacity to work together to meet the enormous challenges facing it.”

“Newspapers are as a mirror which is endowed with hearing, sight and speech; they are a wonderful phenomenon and a great matter. But it behooveth the writers thereof to be sanctified from the prejudice of egotism and desire and to be adorned with the ornament of equity and justice; they must inquire into matters as much as possible, in order that they may be informed of the real facts, and commit the same to writing.”

The media have both a powerful influence on people’s attitudes and perceptions and a weighty responsibility to contribute to social integration. Currently, a great deal of media attention is focussed on the seemingly insurmountable differences that divide peoples and nations, and little attention is given to evidence that these differences can be overcome. The media have a responsibility to help people understand that diversity, often a source of conflict, can also be a powerful resource for social development.

Based on the above, we set out below our recommendations:

- a) The broadcast media have a responsibility to reflect not only the signs of despair but also the signs of hope. By reminding broadcasters of their legal obligation to serve the public good, to educate and to advance society, citizens’ groups can tap the power of the media for the betterment of the human family and society as a whole;
- b) Given the power of television and radio to influence social values, the public has an abiding interest in how the airwaves are used. We have great reason to be concerned about the

debilitating effect of the violence, aggression, materialism, illicit sexual activity, immorality, and inurement to human suffering offered by much of the broadcast media;

- c) Public awareness campaigns to promote the principle of unity in diversity. These campaigns should make use of the arts and the full range of media, including television, video, film, radio, electronic networks, books, magazines, posters, flyers, theatre and music and by enlisting the support of the advertising and entertainment industries, the media -- both traditional and non-traditional, NGOs, and popular personalities, to reach homes, the work place, public areas and schools;
- d) Eliminate stereotyping based on religion, culture, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and nationality from media programming. By focussing on constructive, unifying and cooperative undertakings, the media could demonstrate humanity's capacity to work together to meet the enormous challenges facing it;
- e) The media should highlight the importance and the honour of service. Through service, the essential principles of social integration – including compassion, acceptance, love, understanding, sacrifice, humility, and commitment to justice – are manifested in society. Not only does service provide immediate benefits to the community, but it also creates bonds of solidarity and common purpose among those involved; and
- f) Provide more space for sharing of cultural and inter faith understanding and highlighting positive and unifying aspects of diversity of humanity.

In attempting to put these ideas into practice, Bahá'í communities are living laboratories for religious unity; people from every religious tradition meet with the shared intention of establishing and strengthening the ties of unity among them. We gather to worship, to deepen our understanding of spiritual truths, to discover the requirements for social progress, to solve common practical problems, to organize and carry out activities for the welfare of mankind, and, last but not least, simply to enjoy the pleasures of friendship. Religious prejudice gives way to inter-religious brotherhood. We share a common goal: to demonstrate through deeds that the oneness of mankind is a reality and that its fruits are the material, intellectual and spiritual progress of all those who live in its light.



Some Essential Principles To Guide Us In The Search For National Unity

A. The Oneness Of Mankind

Bahá'ís share a common goal: to demonstrate through deeds that the oneness of mankind is a reality and that its fruits are the material, intellectual and spiritual progress of all those who live in its light.

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind ... is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations ... Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family ... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not 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.

B. Justice

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, 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 neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.

C. Consultation

Central to the task of re-conceptualizing the system of human relationships is the process that Bahá'u'lláh refers to as consultation. “In all things it is necessary to consult,” is His advice. “The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.” The standard of truth seeking this process demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that

tend to characterize the present-day discussion of human affairs. It cannot be achieved — indeed, its attainment is severely handicapped — by the culture of protest that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society. Debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

What Bahá'u'lláh is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candour and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavour that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organizing principle of every project. “No man can attain his true station,” is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, “except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.”

D. Equality

The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment.

The denial of equality perpetrates injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which peace can emerge and a just and united world civilization develop and flourish. Therefore, a deep commitment to the establishment of equality between men and women, in all departments of life and at every level of society, will be essential to humanity's advancement.

E. Empowerment

So far as earthly existence is concerned, many of the greatest achievements of religion have been moral in character. Through its teachings and through the examples of human lives illumined by these teachings, masses of people in all ages and lands have developed the capacity to love. They have learned to discipline the animal side of their natures, to make great sacrifices for the common good, to practice forgiveness, generosity, and trust, to use wealth and other resources in ways that serve the advancement of civilization. Institutional systems have been devised to translate these moral advances into the norms of social life on a vast scale. However obscured by dogmatic accretions and diverted by sectarian conflict, the spiritual impulses set in motion by such

transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad have been the chief influence in the civilizing of human character.

Since, then, the challenge is the empowerment of humankind through a vast increase in access to knowledge, the strategy that can make this possible must be constructed around an ongoing and intensifying dialogue between science and religion. It is — or by now should be — a truism that, in every sphere of human activity and at every level, the insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application. People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from conjecture — indeed to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality; the extent to which individuals and institutions so equipped can contribute to human progress, however, will be determined by their devotion to truth and their detachment from the promptings of their own interests and passions. Another capacity that science must cultivate in all people is that of thinking in terms of process, including historical process; however, if this intellectual advancement is to contribute ultimately to promoting development, its perspective must be unclouded by prejudices of race, culture, sex, or sectarian belief. Similarly, the training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth will advance the aims of development only to the extent that such an impulse is illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organization.

F. Education

The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

The development of a global society calls for the cultivation of capacities far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. The challenges ahead will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge on the part of individuals and organizations alike. Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only to the extent that both individuals and groups in every sector of society are able to acquire knowledge and to apply it to the shaping of human affairs.

The Bahá'í Teachings state that when it is impossible for a family to educate all its children — a condition that should be eradicated in the future — priority should be given to education of the girl since mothers are the first educators of future generations.

Education must be life-long. It should help people to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to earn a livelihood and to contribute confidently and constructively to shaping communities that reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. It should also help the individual develop a sense of place and community, grounded in the local, but embracing the whole world. Successful education will cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and will nurture in individuals a deep sense of service and an active commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all mankind. It will encourage self-reflection and thinking in terms of historical process, and it will promote inspirational learning through such means as music, the arts, poetry, meditation and interaction with the natural environment.



