

# Towards 2000-The Need for a New Global Environmental Ethic

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## Abstract

Consideration of the environment cannot be divorced from other issues such as peace, disarmament, and the advancement of women. The Baha'i view is that what is necessary to cure the world's ills is nothing less than the reconstruction of the world's political and social organization.

In the article "The End of the Hunting Season in History," Shimon Peres states that the key events of the last decade "failed to obey the rules of change" inasmuch as "classical political instruments such as the army, parties or even superpowers, have had no role to play at all." The reason is that these profound changes, such as the collapse of communism and apartheid, are "struggles for a fundamental change, a change in the very content of existence." "Power and well being," writes Peres, "no longer stem from material resources... but from intellectual dimensions—science, technology, information." This is similar to the Baha'i view.

Such a fundamental shift is being driven by a new set of values, values that express the desire of humanity to live in harmony as citizens of one global society. This harmony necessarily involves living in harmony with the environment. Perhaps Vaclav Havel states it most succinctly. Addressing the US Congress in 1990 he said:

Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in our being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which our world is headed...will be unavoidable...We are still incapable of understanding that the only genuine backbone of all our actions—if they are to be moral—is responsibility: responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success, responsibility to the order of being where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged.

Developing a consciousness of world citizenship will not be easy but Baha'u'llah states that, "Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth." In another passage He proclaimed, "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." Thus, the solution to the environmental problem lies in large part in imbuing a worldview.

But the solution also depends on developing certain common values as well. As is stated by the Commission on Global Governance: "Ultimately no organization will work and no law upheld unless they rest on a foundation made strong by shared values. These values must be informed by a sense of common responsibility for both present and future generations". In *The Promise of World Peace*, this is stated as being a prerequisite for social and environmental reconstruction:

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.”

## **Transitions for a Stable World**

There are several aspects to consider in the transition to a stable world:

1. Demographic. The human population cannot double every decade. Change in demography implies much more than birth control devices. Fundamental change must address women’s education, economic development, health of women and children.
2. Economic. Fundamental change is required here. We must live off nature’s dividend, not its capital. One strategy is the incorporation of environmental assets into the price structure. Also, fiscal incentives can be used to promote sustainability.
3. Technological transition. We cannot go into the future with today’s technology. For example; emissions/unit of output will have to fall dramatically, which implies a massive change in production methods.
4. W. Ruckelshaus’ idea on values, and the institutions to embody those values, for sustainable development: We first need to identify the values to create a sustainability consciousness. Institutions need to be established to implement the values, along with proposals for global mechanisms.
5. The current world effort to create the legal and moral framework for sustainable development and environmental protection includes the International Covenant on Environment and Development and the formulation of International charters.

## **Conclusion**

The Baha’i Writings indicate that, “World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm... Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace.”

Acceptance of this principle will also be essential to any successful attempt to establish harmony with nature and sustainable development.