

A close-up photograph of two hands, one larger and one smaller, clasped together in a gesture of support or agreement. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is dark, making the skin tones stand out. The text is overlaid on the image.

**Striving Towards Justice:  
Transforming the Dynamics of Human Interaction**

Bahá'í International Community's Statement  
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women  
New York  
28 February 2009



**The equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women is an integral component of the establishment of relationships rooted in justice—relationships, which underlie the well-being and development of individuals, families and communities. There can be no doubt that, in this day, the equality of men and women—manifested in part through a just and equal sharing of responsibilities—is attainable and urgently needed. While many of the world’s governments have committed to the promotion of an equal partnership between men and women in family, community and public life, individuals continue to struggle against entrenched patterns of dominance and violence that characterize much of human interaction.**

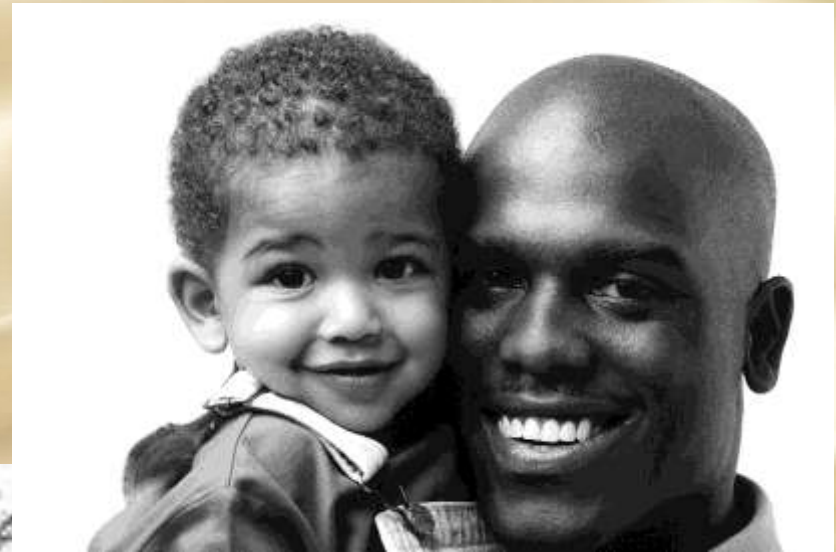


The goal of sharing responsibilities **raises questions about the nature and purpose of human life and how these inform the scope and allocation of responsibilities.** The worldwide Bahá'í community is guided by its recognition of the essential nobility of every human being—the capacity to develop spiritually and intellectually and to become a source of support and advantage to others. **We see each individual as the possessor of inestimable talents, which, through education, can be developed and manifested in service to the common good.** Furthermore, while men and women are physically distinct, their spiritual identities are equal—the soul has no gender. Each one, then, must play a role in striving for the well-being of others and, **ultimately, in co-creating a social order that fosters the spiritual and material well-being of all peoples.**

# Honesty

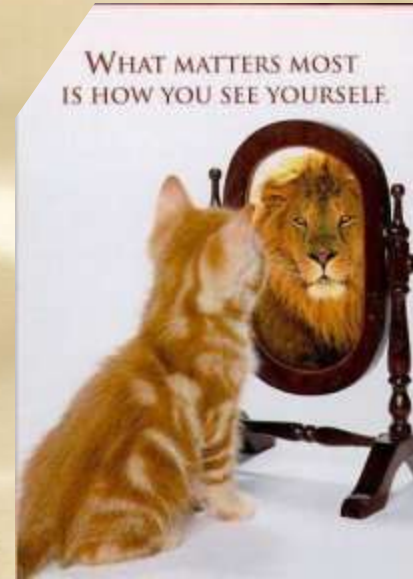


In this collective endeavor, **the individual, the community and the institutions of society play an important role.** It is, in fact, not possible to separate an individual from his or her environment and seek to reform one without the other; **one's inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it.** The downward spiral of family disintegration; **the lack of labor and educational opportunities for women;** the proliferation of single female or child-headed households; female feticide; the isolation of the elderly women; and **the persistent violence against girls and women are all symptoms of a social order** which has yet to harness the capacity for collaboration, service, excellence and justice latent in every human being. To the extent that government policies **and programs recognize that institutional and social change must be accompanied by a transformation of human values,** will they be able to effect abiding changes in the dynamics that characterize the allocation of responsibilities, including care-giving, between men and women.



Boys should  
respect girls

At the level of the individual, change **will require a fundamental rethinking in the way that boys are socialized to become men** and how this socialization is carried over into family, community and public life. Differential child-rearing strategies, parental expectations as well as the abusive treatment of female family members have long perpetuated males' sense of privilege and superiority. Furthermore, **they have contributed to narrow definitions of masculinity and femininity**, the devaluation of the contributions made by women and to the perpetuation of patterns of dominance, oppression, as well as poverty.



Recognizing the need **for a fundamental transformation of attitudes and behaviors**—to effect change in the dynamics of human interaction—the worldwide Bahá'í community **has focused on the spiritual and moral education of children**, helping them to form a strong moral identity and the capacity to demonstrate the principle of the equality of men and women. **A particular emphasis has been placed on the education of children, aged 12-15—the junior youth**



At this pivotal age, young people are beginning to develop a sense of personal moral responsibility and decision making, **are refining their critical thinking skills and are eager to explore the many issues to which their consciences are slowly awakening.** In many parts of the world, they already bear the weight of life's hardships and have the ability to think deeply about the world around them. As they navigate this critical period in their lives, **they must be given the tools to recognize the moral issues underlying the choices they make.**



This stage of development presents an important opportunity for parents, communities, and institutions to help young **people not only to develop a positive identity but also to elevate their thinking and to adopt an outward-looking orientation**, which inspires them to work towards the betterment of their communities. For boys, efforts in this direction should provide, among other things, the **tools to develop the moral courage to take on new roles and responsibilities**, especially those traditionally associated with the contributions of girls; for girls, such efforts should provide the tools to discover **and to begin to develop their broad-ranging capacities in all arenas of human endeavor**.



The emphasis on the transformation of attitudes is also reflected in the decisions of several United Nations agencies to work with faith-based organizations to achieve gender equality. In 2008, for example, both UNFPA<sup>1</sup> and UNIFEM<sup>2</sup> made strides in this direction: UNFPA brought together over 100 faith-based organizations and religious leaders to discuss collaboration in areas of gender and development issues<sup>3</sup>; UNIFEM **launched a new partnership with 'Religions for Peace' in the 'Say No to Violence Against Women' campaign**, which seeks to engage faith communities worldwide to lead efforts to end violence against women. The decision to engage with faith-based organizations signals a search for new ways of thinking and approaching the conditions perpetuating unjust relationships between men and **women—specifically, ways informed by spiritual and moral dimensions of human life.**



Guided by these dimensions, the efforts of the Bahá'í community to address gender equality have also attended closely to the manner in which this goal is pursued. **A distinguishing feature of Bahá'í initiatives is that they unfold within a broader goal of preserving and strengthening the unity of the family and of society.** The methods employed take into consideration the cultural patterns of society and adopt an evolutionary view of change; **they emphasize encouragement, collective decision-making, the building of trust, and a complimentarity —rather than sameness—of roles.**



One example of these principles in action is **the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in Indore, India, which focuses on empowering disadvantaged rural and tribal girls and women.** The Institute uses a life-cycle approach to provide holistic training programs, **which teach and encourage men and women to demonstrate equality in the home, at school, at work as well as in community, religious and public life.** The curriculum takes a culturally sensitive approach that seeks to eradicate entrenched attitudes which perpetuate oppressive and violent relationships. While the curriculum tackles issues such as alcohol abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS, and exploitation, **these are understood as the symptoms rather than the problem itself.** The primary aim, then, is to address underlying values and attitudes, which are primary obstacles to establishing more just relationships.



The subjects addressed by the curriculum include: **sharing parental responsibilities; the equality of husband and wife; the education of girls; the use of non-adversarial decision-making; and service to the community.** Couples who have completed the curriculum have noted a greater sense of unity in the family; a reduction or cessation of physical violence; a greater ability to express their thoughts at home and in public; **and an increasing practice of consulting together to resolve family problems.**



In conclusion, we encourage governments gathered at the Commission for the Status of Women to:

- consider **the spiritual and moral dimensions** of attitudes and interactions that have shaped the unjust divisions of responsibilities **between men and women**;
- consider **the roles that the individuals, communities and institutions of society must play** and the interaction between them in order to effect a more just allocation of responsibilities;
- give **special attention to the education of young people aged 12-15**, who are leaving behind childhood and undergoing profound change, both morally and intellectually; and
- consider drawing on **the skills and capacities of faith-based organizations** to work towards a transformation of **attitudes and behaviors**.

**You are already a Bahá'í when you believe...**

**That Bahá'u'lláh is the  
Manifestation of God  
for this day and age**



**We are each responsible for  
independently recognizing  
God's spiritual truths.  
We cannot rely on the  
traditional beliefs of our  
parents, teachers or clergy.**



**Science and religion, and faith  
and reason are not in conflict.  
They are just different ways  
of investigating reality.**



**Women and men are equal.**



**We are created noble.  
Our free will is the key  
to developing our spiritual  
potential. We develop through  
service to God and humanity.**



**World Peace is inevitable. It must  
be founded on justice supported**

**by an International Federation  
that is dedicated to promoting  
unity and protecting diversity.**

**Everyone is needed in the  
process of building a just and  
peaceful world.**



**We are spiritual beings who are  
shaped through our choices in  
the tests of this life. After death,  
we continue to learn and progress  
as spiritual beings.**



**This world is just one family.  
Prejudices of race and gender  
are unacceptable.**



**God loves us all. Different  
Prophets have, and will always,  
come to mankind. Essential  
truth is one, but our perception  
of it is relative. Social laws  
change according to mankind's  
maturity.**



## A prayer for all mankind

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.

O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.

O God! Establish the Most Great Peace.

Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together....

Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 101