

WORLD NEWS

Bahá'í United Nations representative addresses world leaders at the Millennium Summit

Speaking in his capacity as the Co-Chair of the Millennium Forum, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations addressed world leaders gathered at the Millennium Summit on 8th September, urging them to join in a global partnership with civil society to create a peaceful and more prosperous world.

"This historic Summit may well be remembered as having opened the door to a long-awaited era of peace, justice and prosperity for all humanity," said Techeste Ahderom, who led the Millennium Forum, which brought together some 1,350 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the United Nations last May to consult about humanity's future in anticipation of this week's Millennium Summit of world leaders.

"This new era will, of course, require concrete deeds and not just words," Mr Ahderom continued. "We in civil society stand ready to work with you and your governments, side by side, in a strong new partnership to create this new world. At the same time, civil society also stands ready to hold you to your commitments if you do not deliver on your words."

In his capacity as Co-Chair of the Millennium Forum, Mr Ahderom was the only Summit speaker who represented civil society at large. The Summit drew more than 150 world leaders, making it the largest gathering of heads of state and government ever held.

In his address, Mr Ahderom said that the Millennium Forum, which was organised by non-governmental organisations and held 22nd-26th May 2000 at the United Nations, was one of the most diverse and significant gatherings of civil society ever held.

"The Forum was significant for its attempt to accelerate the process among NGOs of networking and coalition building across issue areas that has proved to be such a powerful force for change and social action in today's world," said Mr Ahderom. "The Forum's focus was on six main issues: peace and security, the eradication of poverty, human rights, sustainable development and the environment, the challenges of globalization, and "strengthening and democratising the United Nations."

Mr Ahderom asked Summit leaders to carefully review the Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action, a document that was drafted and adopted by NGOs and civil society organisations gathered at the Forum last May, who came from some 115 countries - including a large number from the developing world.

The Forum's Declaration, he said, "offers a bold vision for humanity's future and outlines a series of concrete steps that the United Nations, governments, and members of civil society themselves can take to address the global problems facing humanity today."

In particular, Mr Ahderom told world leaders, the Forum's Declaration condemns global poverty as a "violation of human rights," urges the immediate cancellation of Third World debt, calls for a "strengthened and democratised United Nations" with a reformed Security Council, invigorated through an enlarged membership, more democratic procedures, and eventual elimination of the veto.

Mr Ahderom also explained that the Forum's Declaration states that while globalisation offers "significant opportunities for people to connect, share and learn from each other," in its currently unregulated form it increases "inequities between and within countries, undermines local traditions and cultures, and escalates disparities between rich and poor, thereby marginalising large numbers of people in urban and rural areas."

The Declaration urges governments to make serious "commitments to restructure the global financial architecture based on principles of equity, transparency, accountability, and democracy", stating clearly that the United Nations should be the pre-eminent international organisation, overseeing the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO.

Mr Aherdom was selected as the Co-Chair of the Forum early last year after heading up an interim planning committee that emerged from the Task Force on UN Reform of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO). In his position as Co-Chair of the Forum, he headed up the Forum's Executive Committee and directed the work of its Secretariat, all in the capacity of an unpaid volunteer.

As the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, Mr Aherdom is mainly responsible for the Community's work on human rights issues at the United Nations.

The Bahá'í International Community was recognised as an international non-governmental organisation at the United Nations in 1948. It represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith at the United Nations and in other fora. The Bahá'í Faith has some five million members and has established communities in more than 235 countries and territories. In addressing the Millennium Summit, Mr Aherdom sought to tell world leaders about the Millennium Forum and its results, emphasising the important role civil society has played in promoting positive social change.

"Throughout history, from the abolition of slavery to the recognition of the equality of women and men, most great social movements have begun not with governments but with ordinary people," Mr. Aherdom said. "In 1945, civil society again played an important role in shaping many of the key articles found in the Charter of the United Nations, especially in the area of human rights."

"More recently," he said, "NGOs have played a leading role in shaping and supporting an International Criminal Court, in the movement for debt cancellation, and in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines."

Mr Aherdom called on world leaders to grant NGOs and civil society groups increased access to the UN General Assembly as a first step towards an invigorated partnership for the new century.

Speakers at the Summit were limited to heads of state and government, foreign ministers, along with a few leaders of international, intergovernmental organisations, such as the League of Arab States and the Commission of the European Community. A few international organisations with observer status at the United Nations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, also spoke. Mr. Aherdom, however, was the only representative to speak who represented a wide association of civil society and non-governmental organizations around the world.

Millennium Forum and Summit Web sites <http://www.millenniumforum.org/>
and <http://www.un.org/>To find out about the worldwide Bahá'í community, visit

<http://www.bahai.org/> or contact Brad Pokorny, e-mail: <mailto:bpokorny@bic.org>

Bahá'í International News in photos

Unity of purpose - Bahá'í communities world-wide are trying to make the world a better place



Pakistan: Bahá'ís were among the 1,000 people who took part in a "Free Quetta from pollution" walk in July 1999. Reports were broadcast on TV news.



Vanuatu: Bahá'í children and youth from Mele village in their "Unity in Action" tee shirts performed on the occasion of the 1999 Bertha Dobins Award presentation held in Port Vila, in October. Some 250 people attended, including the Minister of Youth and Sports and the Minister of Health.

Jobs at New Era High School

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India invite applications for the post of Vice-Principal New Era High School, Panchgani for the academic year beginning April 2001 The New Era High School is one of the most prestigious Bahá'í co-educational institutions in the world. It offers, in a boarding environment, a multifaceted primary and secondary education programme and besides inculcating pursuit of academic excellence, aims to prepare students for service to humanity.

Please send applications with resumé to: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, Bahá'í House, 6, Canning Road, New Delhi - 110001 Fax: 91-11-3782178 e-mail: <mailto:nsaindia@bahaindia.org>

