

***“Security, Prosperity and Values:
Canada and the Global Community”***



A Submission to the Dialogue on Foreign Policy

from the

Bahá’í Community of Canada

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Summary

The Bahá'í Community of Canada welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Minister of Foreign Affairs' *Dialogue on Foreign Policy*. We comment on the three current pillars of Canadian foreign policy: security, prosperity and values. Fundamental to the challenge of conducting foreign policy today is the fashioning of a new organizing principle in international affairs. Canada, by virtue of its history, diverse population, multilateral credentials and unique relationship to the United States, can play an unusually creative role in the evolution of world affairs over the coming years. The nation-state system that has dominated world affairs for some 350 years no longer serves the world's needs. In an age marked by growing trans-national cooperation in both the private and public sectors, neither does a unipolar world. The principle of the oneness of humankind provides a practical principle by which contemporary foreign policy can best be pursued. Useful as an ideal or vision by which to set a new direction in the evolution of human affairs over the coming years, the oneness of humankind can also serve as a very practical and strategic guide in renewing the tools of Canadian diplomacy, defence and international development policy.

Among the implications of this principle we mention three in particular. First, we urge Canada to promote as energetically as possible genuine reform of the multilateral system towards effective and credible global governance. Second, Canada needs to deepen efforts only just begun to understand and promote sustainable development. This will require a more robust concept of prosperity than conventional understandings rooted in assumptions that reflect a culture of materialism. Prosperity, as a defining pillar of Canadian foreign policy, needs to be recast so that the concept includes a measure of participation in social and economic decision-making by peoples at all levels of society. The concept needs to include adequate reference to education and its universal accessibility, to the processes by which knowledge is generated and applied, and to standards of justice and equity, all essential elements in any adequate concept of human prosperity. Third, it is time to develop a more thorough appreciation, in Canadian foreign policy, for interfaith relationships based squarely on Canadian values of religious freedom and pluralism that, in today's global community, are necessary prerequisites to world peace and human solidarity.

Introduction

Human history has often made radical shifts in thinking and organization only after tragedy. It is at these moments when the shortcomings of past conventions are clearly exposed and open to challenge. The tragedy of September 11, 2001, and events that have followed on that devastating attack, demonstrate that the traditional security offered by geography has come to an end. No longer can the oceans and vast distances of the planet ensure the safety once taken for granted by many of the world's peoples including those of the North American continent. Globalization, the term that has emerged in recent years to describe the demise of time and space as barriers to human activity, clearly impacts international affairs in ways unimaginable to past generations.

If we are to face the foreign policy challenges of the twenty-first century effectively, it is vital to re-examine the direction of our current foreign policy and the assumptions and principles that drive that policy. To this end, the Bahá'í Community of Canada commends the efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for initiating the current Foreign Policy Dialogue. We are particularly impressed by the consultative approach adopted with the goal of hearing the views of all Canadians. The work over the past two decades of the Canadian Government and its Department of Foreign Affairs in defending the fundamental human rights of our Bahá'í brothers and sisters in Iran, members of that country's largest religious minority, leaves our community ever grateful for the principled practice of Canadian foreign policy. In this document, the Bahá'í community of Canada responds to the Minister's call for dialogue by offering several ideas that we believe will usefully contribute to new thinking about Canada's foreign policy and a timely re-evaluation of the three pillars of security, prosperity and values which have served as the framework for that policy.

Security

With Particular Reference to Dialogue Questions #1, 4, 5, & 6

Security can be defined as freedom from danger, risk and fear. The provision of security is a prime function of the modern nation-state and a driving force behind its original creation. Nation-states today, however, are increasingly challenged by new conditions prevailing throughout the world that threaten to erode many of the functions previously within their mandate. Key amongst these new challenges are those posed by global networks that link peoples across the planet in many areas of activity. While some of these networks have brought benefits and facilitated unprecedented levels of economic prosperity and trans-national cooperation, others have created new risks and threats and been abused by agents using them for their own ends. One way to mitigate such risks is to filter the traffic crossing global networks more closely. This path involves greater border controls, immigration restrictions, surveillance and public vigilance, amongst other measures. While such an approach may be necessary in the short-term, it is questionable if it is sustainable, effective or even desirable in the long term. One must ask if a society whose members are suspicious of each other from within and constantly on guard for attacks from outside has not already lost the very freedom from fear and anxiety that

security is meant to ensure. To attain true security, therefore, it is worth re-evaluating some of the reasons why it is necessary to develop such an elaborate security apparatus in the first place.

At the heart of the problem, from a Bahá'í perspective, is a lack of unity amongst the peoples of the world. Through history, humans have achieved unity at the level of families, tribes, city-states and nations. Each stage in the achievement of new levels of human organization and solidarity required courage and an expansion in human capacity and mutual reciprocity. At the dawn of this new millennium, we live in a world that has reached remarkable levels of technological and economic unity. Yet, at the level of human consciousness, identity and polity, we are still far from united. We do not have a clearly distinguishable common cause or purpose. We still usually emphasise the good of the parts over the good of the whole, whenever vital choices between the two are necessary. To achieve true security both at the global and national level, Bahá'ís believe that the achievement of world unity is an essential prerequisite. Without a greater measure of unity, and a profound understanding of the oneness of the human family, and the implications of that oneness, our fundamental security is unattainable.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith, “the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” If this statement is true, then all current attempts at achieving security without unity cannot succeed, as the edifice upon which such attempts are made is built on an unstable and tottering foundation. World unity, or the oneness of humanity, is not merely a lofty ideal, nor is it meant to dismiss a moderate and appropriate nationalism. Rather, the principle of the oneness or unity of humanity has important practical implications, calling for a reassessment of the nature of the relationships that exist between nations and how we might best develop those relationships in an age where increasing global harmony and understanding is essential to the very survival of the human species.

A principle of world unity offers a new perspective on the role and responsibilities of the three traditional instruments of Canadian foreign policy: diplomacy, defence and development. Canada's diplomatic service would be more coherent if it were animated by the clearly articulated principle of the oneness of the human family as an effective organizing principle on which day-to-day foreign policy decisions can be made. Canada's defence policy should look towards how best Canadian military and peace-building expertise can contribute to those international alliances and collective security measures which serve to enhance human security, justice and the rule of law throughout the global community. And our international development policy and priorities must be directly related to a vision of global economic and social justice that includes a framework encouraging participation in policy and decision-making by all those affected by economic and social development initiatives.

Insecurity is very much a global problem that, like other global problems, is indivisible. If the entire world is not secure, then no part is truly secure. Claims of security in one nation or region, if other nations or regions are smouldering or burning,

are folly. This is true not only at the level of principle, but also in practical terms, as manifested in what international relations scholars call the security dilemma. In this scenario, nations that attempt to create security by building military forces often find an actual decline in their relative security (thus, the dilemma) as potential adversaries match such actions to protect their own perceived security. In *A Dialogue on Foreign Policy*, it is stated that “protecting the security of our nation and contributing to global security” remains a central goal of Canadian foreign policy. But if security is indeed indivisible, then global security cannot be merely supplemental to Canada’s national security, but must be seen as an integral part of it.

Owing to Canada’s unique history of uniting diverse people with various interests in one common homeland that also celebrates their diversity, we are ideally positioned to promote a concept of unity on a global scale. We can do no better for our own security interests than to actively share our experiences and lessons learnt with the world. Such an approach could well begin by paying greater attention to advancing this principle in concert with our closest neighbour and ally, the United States of America. For all our differences, the United States and Canada share an experience of cultural and religious diversity. Both countries base their acceptance of diversity as a positive value on well developed concepts of pluralism, reliance on the rule of law, and on an extensive understanding of federalism and the importance of a range of fundamental freedoms, from respect of minorities to freedom of religion. The moral principles reflected in Canadian and American foreign policy should allow each of these two unique, and admittedly different societies, to work together to advance a vision of global unity in which the different emphasis of each of our two North American approaches are given adequate play, but whose broad agreements can serve to invite other nations and cultures of the world to contribute their own set of values and diversity of outlooks to an essentially harmonious and united global family.

A renewed effort to define a partnership with the United States that takes account of the global imperatives of the twenty-first century, will obviously involve Canada’s long-term commitment to building a global multilateral order which both countries were so centrally involved in creating more than fifty years ago. At a time of idealism and out of the tragedy of the Second World War, Canadian foreign policy took bold initiatives in contributing to the enormous task of building a new international order. The American understanding of the new challenges in advancing an international order appropriate to the twenty-first century will not necessarily always be the same as Canada’s, but Canada can play a major role in reinforcing our neighbour’s long-standing appreciation of those values of international law, human rights, cooperation and reciprocity which will surely remain important values in the United States of America in the years to come.

As Canada reshapes the tools of foreign policy in alignment with deeper and more effective multilateral cooperation and arrangements, it will mean a greater investment in building a credible collective security mechanism. It will also mean a more serious and credible approach to applying the human rights standards so meticulously erected in an array of human rights instruments over the past few decades but which have, in recent

years, not always been applied and enforced with the integrity reflected in the language of those international agreements.

Recent events may well have opened opportunities for such reform in a way that makes timely creative and bold proposals previously considered too far-reaching. On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the formation of the United Nations in 1995, the Bahá'í International Community, along with scores of other non-governmental organizations, governments, commissions and think-tanks recommended a series of UN reforms that were urgently needed then, but are today even more compelling – and perhaps more welcome by the international community. As part of our contribution to this dialogue, we would like to recall some of the proposals from our own document, *A Turning Point*.

In reconsidering the range of recommendations for reform, it is important to point out that the United Nations is an evolving institution whose improvement cannot occur or be understood outside the broader context of the evolving international order in which it operates. As the Baha'i Community stated in 1995, "Judged in isolation from the reality within which it operates, the United Nations will always seem inefficient and ineffective. However, if it is viewed as one element of a larger process of development in systems of international order, the bright light of analysis would shift from the UN's shortcomings and failures to shine on its victories and accomplishments. To those with an evolutionary mindset, the early experience of the United Nations offers us a rich source of learning about its future role within the international regime."

Among the components of the United Nations system in need of reform are the General Assembly and Security Council. At a symbolic level, the General Assembly is humankind's legislature. It is the forum where representatives from the world's nations meet to discuss the planet's problems openly and pass legislation in the form of resolutions. At the practical level, however, these decisions often bear no fruit as they lack enforcement outside voluntary self-enforcement by nation states. This ineffectiveness leaves this body chronically weak and in dire need of credibility.

To strengthen the reputation of the General Assembly, the Bahá'í Community put forward a number of suggestions in 1995. Key amongst those was a call to raise the minimum standards for entry into the General Assembly by country representatives to better reflect a genuine democratic character of the Assembly and a more fundamental respect for the human rights of citizens represented on that body. There seems little question that the credibility and reputation of the United Nations will continue to suffer until such time as sufficient internal reform occurs by which those that serve the General Assembly do so via some form of electoral means involving participation by the people represented. If it were widely believed that General Assembly resolutions truly did constitute the moral authority of the world's collective will, then such decisions would gain growing respect over time and take on a force that would make violation of them increasingly difficult.

A second United Nations body that is in clear need of reform is the Security Council. Established with the goal of ensuring the world's peace and security, this body is often perceived to be an institution of privilege and asymmetric standards. To a significant

degree, the bulwarks of “permanent membership” and “veto power” that are key pillars of its composition sustain this view. To achieve its goals of peace and security effectively, the Bahá’í Community has for many years called for the gradual elimination of permanent membership and veto power. In this way, all states can feel assured that no party is above the law and that justice is not a mere function of power. Realizing that the elimination of permanent membership and the veto are long-term goals, we suggest that limitations be set on the use of the veto so that more resolutions can pass in the near term. In the UN Charter, the veto was introduced to assure permanent members that they would not be subject to attacks or the use of their forces against their will. Yet the veto quickly grew beyond its original intent and was used as an instrument of national interests on a plethora of issues. Perhaps as a first step, Canada can take steps to encourage the use of veto as it was originally envisioned.

Over time, Bahá’ís believe that the Security Council can best fulfil its mandate of preserving the world’s peace and security if it becomes the vessel for a robust collective security system. In the nineteenth century, Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith described such an arrangement to the political leaders of his time, stating, “Be united, O Kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your people find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.” While the majority dismissed his vision as a utopian dream at that time, the devastation from warfare since that proclamation has made the necessity of its adoption more compelling to growing multitudes of humanity over time. This is validated by the fact that justifications for military action today invariably need the legitimization of a “coalition”.

To move beyond mere rhetorical and ad-hoc manifestations of collective security it is time for progressive nations like Canada to work with similar states and create the necessary mechanisms for this system’s institutionalisation. To this end, an effective international force under Security Council authority could fulfil a number of urgent mandates pertinent to global security. Besides collective security, such a force would also provide much needed backbone to Security Council resolutions, which today lack a consistent and systematic means of enforcement.

Such a system could also be one of the best safeguards against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these weapons, in combination with elusive global networks bent on the use of violence for narrow political interests, pose a lethal threat to the world’s peace. Never before in human history could so few cause devastation to so many. In confronting this threat, an international force that is used as a last resort to confront states pursuing such weapons is surely a strong and legitimate deterrent against such endeavours. Perhaps more fundamentally, however, such a force can provide all states and peoples with an unprecedented sense of security that would eliminate much of the motivation and underlying desperation behind the drive for such weapons in the first instance.

The work of the Canadian-initiated Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, summarized in the booklet *The Responsibility to Protect*, has a great deal to offer in the context of developing the guidelines required as the world makes the transition to an era of supra-national governance that is both responsible and representative. It is important that renewed investment in Canada's defence capabilities takes its cue from this kind of thinking and follows a strategy that will see our nation take leadership in establishing the tools necessary for global security in the fullest sense of the term and, more particularly, in consideration of the security of all the world's citizens.

Prosperity

With particular reference to Dialogue Question #8

Canada's second foreign policy pillar calls for the promotion of prosperity in Canada and around the world. A reassessment of the past decade since the last foreign policy review shows rapid economic growth in many parts of the world thanks to the proliferation of economic globalization. The same period, however, has also recorded a widening gulf between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor within most countries. Attempts at economic development over the last half of the twentieth century have clearly failed to reach the optimistic forecasts predicted. A small affluent minority and an impoverished majority characterize the world today. The goal for prosperity, in a world of unacceptable poverty, hunger, economic inequality, unemployment and inadequate access to health care and education must remain a central concern of all. But in the battle to achieve prosperity, the Bahá'í Community of Canada calls on the Canadian government to reconsider the fundamental character of what we mean by prosperity. For decades, attempts at increasing prosperity through government welfare and redistribution programs domestically, and foreign aid and development internationally have solely focused on a narrow materialistic definition of prosperity. This approach, to Bahá'ís, is based on a misinterpretation of human nature that ignores the spiritual dimension that is an integral part of our being.

Acknowledging the inherent dignity and worth of each and every human being directly implies an often neglected feature of genuine prosperity. Prosperity must include a measure or degree of participation in the decision-making, policy creation and actual implementation of social and economic development plans by all those affected by a particular policy or program. No longer can development work follow an artificial division between those who do development and those who receive development. This is only one feature of a more robust concept of prosperity.

Development can achieve prosperity when it seeks, first, to liberate human capacities, and thus, does not look for short-term returns on its investment. Masses of humanity today are trapped in conditions, often man-made, that do not permit the exercise of their full capability. In this way, it can be argued that they are denied their rights as human beings. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to education and the opportunity to participate in political life are all rights that must be available to all humanity, no matter where on earth one happens to be born. In formulating foreign

policy relating to prosperity, the Bahá'í Community of Canada encourages the Department of Foreign Affairs to incorporate this holistic account of human nature into its assumptions and programs.

Bahá'ís encourage the Canadian Government to consider the full spectrum of human nature in formulating policies related to prosperity in foreign policy. Our thoughts in this regard come from a document titled *The Prosperity of Humankind* which presented a global strategy for development to the World Conference on Social Development in 1995. This document, from our perspective, remains a conceptual break from current thinking on the subject. In this document, human society is challenged to define its prosperity beyond the mere amelioration of material conditions. True prosperity can only begin with a reconceptualization of human nature, from one that is primarily selfish and based on individual gain to one that is noble and enriched with moral capacities. Bahá'u'lláh alluded to this, when he wrote, “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.” One of the most innate faculties in humans that is not always recognized in the formulation of development programs is that of justice. Humans have a keen sense of recognizing what is just and equitable from what is unjust and exploitative. It is not surprising, therefore, that development programs that only recognize humans as self-serving productive inputs for global markets often fail in their implementation.

The discourse and practice of the development community has gained enormously from understandings and experiences in sustainable development. Sustainable development continues to serve as a highly useful concept around which education, the generation and application of knowledge to the challenges of human existence, and the health, agricultural and commercial infrastructures of societies can be erected. We urge the Canadian government to pay heed to the positive recommendations that came out of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. One important recommendation pointed to a more active consideration of the role religious communities and religious values (if stripped of fanaticism and superstition) can play in building social cohesion, reducing immoderate consumption patterns and generating the development of a longer-term approach to the provision of goods and services among the peoples of the world.

Values and Culture **With Particular Reference to Dialogue Questions #10 & 11**

Finally, Canada's third foreign policy pillar relates to the promotion of Canadian culture and values. In this section, we would like to specifically focus on question eleven of *A Dialogue on Foreign Policy* that asks if Canada should seek out opportunities for fostering intercultural dialogue and interfaith understanding. The Bahá'í Community of Canada is particularly impressed with the inclusion of this issue as part of the twelve questions introduced by the Foreign Affairs Department in this dialogue. Bahá'ís have promoted intercultural and interfaith activities for years, as we believe that overcoming religious prejudice is critical to moving towards a more united and peaceful future. Religion, which has been the source of much of our collective moral guidance throughout

history and still commands the loyalty of billions throughout the world, must not be manipulated as a tool for the acquisition of power or the division of the human race. It must be an instrument that unifies our diversities and provides us with moral enlightenment. To this end and to address question eleven, we strongly encourage the Canadian government to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue both domestically and internationally through its foreign policy.

In adopting such an initiative, however, Canadian foreign policy needs to be wary of too general an understanding of tolerance of any and all beliefs and practices that happen to claim the name of religion. Some extreme, exclusive or fundamentalist religious beliefs and practices must be named for what they are, an abuse of the rights of others, a barrier to human understanding and well-being, and an insult to true religion. In April 2002, the international governing council of the six million Bahá'ís around the globe wrote a letter to the world's religious leaders, calling on them to abandon divisive dogmas and become the promoters of global harmony. The document began by reviewing the way in which prejudices over sex, race and nation became marginalized over the twentieth century. At the end of the century, the majority of humankind no longer viewed a particular gender, race or nation as superior to the rest. In the domain of religion, however, the document pointed out that much work still remains in overcoming prejudices. While great efforts had been exerted in the twentieth century to engage in interfaith dialogue and learning, these initiatives often lacked the intellectual coherence and spiritual commitment by religious adherents that was necessary. This was due to stubborn and entrenched patterns of sectarian thought often manifested by religious leaders, that claimed privileged access to truth – the very source of the bitter conflicts that humanity has known for too long.

Bahá'ís have always believed that the world's major religions derive from the same divine source and speak essentially the same truth. Each of these faiths has played a vital role in positively nurturing the moral character of millions of their adherents. Each has provided its followers with legitimate meaning to life. The document to the world's religious leaders challenges our fellow co-religionists to make a radical reorientation in thinking and put aside any claims that purport exclusivity over truth and spirituality, for the sake of humanity and peace. In this effort, the Canadian government can play an important role by promoting a foreign policy that encourages sincere dialogue amongst the world's great religions. We commend Canada's historic contributions in this area, something our own community has experienced intimately, and ask that Canada continue to be a promoter of human rights, enshrining freedom of religion and belief in all parts of the world.

There are several avenues by which the Canadian government can actively pursue this now crucial issue, but certainly an immediate approach would be in line with Canada's long-term commitment to reinforcing the U.N. system of international human rights. The U.N. Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom has done some work in trying to make operational standards of religious freedom. Canada should support those initiatives. This requires giving attention to those standards that aim to release the creative energies of religious communities currently

oppressed in a number of countries, as well as those standards that call attention to practices and beliefs that are themselves sources of discrimination. Without a systematic, thoughtful and candid approach to understanding world religions, the central role of religion in the lives of the vast majority of the human race, and the importance of the universal and common principles in all the world's religions can play in promoting human solidarity and mutual understanding, will not be fully exploited for the well-being of the global community.

In summary, we urge the consideration of a principle of world unity and the oneness of the human family as a means of bringing coherence and creativity to Canada's diplomatic, defence and development policy. This effort needs to include close collaboration with Canada's private sector and the non-governmental organizations of this country, involving as well close cooperation with the increasing diversity of public sector actors at all levels involved in global networks. The goal: To contribute all we can as a nation to assisting humanity to make the challenging transition from the current, flawed international system to one based more squarely on a concept of world citizenship, human solidarity and equitable relationships among all the world's peoples.

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