

Universal Peace

Hamed Eshraghian

January 24, 2019

Jan 18 marked the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Paris Peace Conference held at the end of World War I. The conference resulted in the establishment of the League of Nations - an organization intended by its founders to secure peace at the international level. This was the first of 3 historical moments in the last 100 years when real, lasting peace seemed within reach. But ultimately the League was not able to prevent a second World War.

The second significant step towards world peace followed World War II when the United Nations Organization was established, a system of international economic institutions came into being, many territories under colonial rule became independent nations, and historic advances were made relating to human rights and international law. But open hostility between the world's two major powers brought humanity dangerously close to a conflict involving nuclear weapons.

The peaceful termination of the Cold War towards the end of the 20th century was the third moment when universal peace seemed within our grasp. The United Nations convened a series of world conferences on themes of importance to humanity's future culminating in the Millennium Forum, a meeting of representatives of over a thousand civil society organizations from more than a hundred countries, followed by the Millennium Summit, an unparalleled gathering of world leaders.

The Baha'i writings note that "these various advances stand as signs of a widespread, gradual but inexorable rise in global consciousness on the part of the earth's peoples and their attraction to universal justice, to solidarity, to collaboration, to compassion, and to equality;" but "the will to engage in international collective action, which twenty years ago represented a powerful strain of thinking among world leaders, has been cowed, assailed by resurgent forces of racism, nationalism, and factionalism."

Despite these forces of disintegration, the Baha'i writings say that the unification of humanity is not only possible but unstoppable because "universal peace is the destination towards which humanity has been moving throughout the ages under the influence of the Word of God that has been progressively imparted by the Creator to His creation." Ultimately, however, world unity requires "unreserved acceptance of the oneness of humankind - the reality that humanity is one people must be the starting point for a new order."

But humanity, according to these writings, is facing a crisis: "Humanity is gripped by a crisis of identity, as various peoples and groups struggle to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, they fall into competing ideologies and power struggles. Seemingly countless permutations of 'us' and 'them' define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists."

These writings ask us to “consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity.” And then explain that “the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Baha’i expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment.”

These writings finally remind us that “fostering unity, by harmonizing disparate elements and nurturing in every heart a selfless love for humankind, is the task of religion,” and point out that “great possibilities to cultivate fellowship and concord are open to religious leaders.”

Let us take a final and decisive step towards enduring peace by first creating, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals until it leads in the end to peace among nations.