

Gender Equality

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March 8th marked the International Women's Day. It was both an occasion for celebrating the achievements of women and a reminder that in addition to the racial prejudice that our communities continue to grapple with, discrimination against women remains one of the injustices of our time.

And yet, "the equality of men and women is a facet of human reality and not just a condition to be achieved for the common good," according to the Baha'i writings. "That which makes human beings human—their inherent dignity and nobility—is neither male nor female. The search for meaning, for purpose, for community; the capacity to love, to create, to persevere, has no gender."

Using the analogy of a bird, these writings say, "The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be."

"As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs," these writings warn. "Hindering women's participation at all levels of society deprives humanity of the full range of potential that comes with a diversity of perspectives in decision-making." In contrast, "providing opportunities, from even the earliest years, for boys to see girls as equals and women as leaders will conduce to a culture of collaboration, and scaffold learning required for sustained and growing expressions of equality."

In 1995 in Beijing, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, governments from around the world agreed on a comprehensive plan—known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—to achieve global gender equality.

Last month, the office of the Baha'i International Community (BIC) released a 40-minute documentary called "Glimpses into the Spirit of Gender Equality", which reflects on the advances that have been made towards gender equality since that conference. The film can be viewed at bic.org/glimpses/.

As we strive to achieve gender equality in our families and places of work, let us share in the film's sense of hope and optimism: "As women are afforded their equal place in society and as women and men increasingly join together to solve the world's greatest challenges, humanity's future prospects grow brighter."