

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Londonderry **Tionól Spioradalta Bhahá'ithe Dhoire**

HOPE FOR 2020

– A STATEMENT BY THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY IN DERRY-LONDONDERRY

We live in “interesting” times – times of challenge and uncertainties, times, for many, of disappointed hopes and of concerns for the future, times for others of hope for progress. It is natural that people ask “how did we get here?” and many experience feelings of powerlessness in the face of events. At the same time there are grounds for optimism for the future, an optimism felt following recent developments in Northern Ireland.

The closing years of the Twentieth Century were a time of optimism. The mutually threatening power blocs of the world seemed to have ended with the Cold War, systems like apartheid that were based on denial of basic human rights were being ended, and of course in Northern Ireland the Belfast (“Good Friday”) Agreement saw if not the establishment of peace then at least a cessation of major hostilities and the growth of arrangements that would allow genuine hopes for lasting peace and justice to be realised. Internationally there was a whole collection of global agreements and plans meant to carry humankind forward into a new millennium of progress and sustainable development with social and economic justice.

As a recent message of the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith put it:

“As the present century opened, new challenges began to loom. With time, these intensified, leading to a retreat from the promising steps forward with which the previous century had closed. Today, many of the dominant currents in societies everywhere are pushing people apart, not drawing them together. Even as global poverty of the most extreme form has decreased, political and economic systems have enabled the enrichment of small coteries with grossly exorbitant wealth—a condition that fuels fundamental instability in world affairs.”

And:

“Religious fundamentalism is warping the character of communities, even nations. The failings of so many organizations and institutions of society have understandably led to a decline in public trust, but this has been systematically exploited by vested interests seeking to undermine the credibility of all sources of knowledge. Certain shared ethical principles, which seemed to be in the ascendant at the start of this century, are eroded, threatening the prevailing consensus about right and wrong that, in various arenas, had succeeded in holding humanity's basest tendencies in check.”

Times of change bring challenges, and often a natural response to these is to retreat into “old certainties” of national, social or religious beliefs, even when all too often these are actually inventions of those with something to gain or an agenda of their own to pursue. The result is fragmented societies and a refusal to accept that we are all inhabitants of one world where the safety and benefit of peoples depends on both recognising our interdependence and being prepared to work together as citizens of that one world.

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As the message says:

“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. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness.”

While to those who fear that this is a call for uniformity:

“Unity, in its Bahá'í 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 realised and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment.”

For the followers of the Bahá'í Faith, this vision of oneness of humankind is key to an understanding of the future of humanity, including, of course, our own troubled part of the world. It is the essential mindset with which to approach the many issues we face here, social, political, and religious.

As the world embarks upon a year that holds great challenges, we call on everyone, whether “in authority” in some way or not, to focus their vision on this essential oneness. Let us all recognise that difference is not a sufficient reason for enmity, that what we have in common is greater and more powerful than the differences between them, and that the reasons for working together can far outweigh those which have been allowed to drive us apart. There are many grass roots organisations that are, like the Bahá'í community, working with people across the community to develop a shared and positive future. We believe that concentrating on what unites us, rather than what divides us, is the true way forward.

This statement was made by the Spiritual Assembly as the elected administrative and representative body of the members of the Bahá'í Faith in Derry.

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