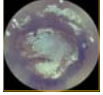
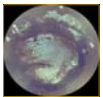


The Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change A Perspective from the Bahá'í International Community



The issue

The global community is at a critical stage in climate policy development. Following recent advances in the scientific and economic understanding of climate change, there is now a pressing concern for the potentially irreversible impacts of climate change on humanity and the environment. This global concern has generated widespread debate about the ethical and moral dimensions such as justice, equity, sustainable development and intergenerational responsibility. The current mode of decision-making and climate policy development, however, has largely been shaped by economic and national priorities. As such, it does not provide a sound basis for a global response to climate change capable of resolving the underlying ethical and moral issues.



The ethical questions

- *Responsibilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions:* What should determine the responsibilities of individual countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions?
- *Priorities for social, economic and sustainable development:* How can developing countries achieve social and economic development without emitting dangerously high levels of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere?
- *Adaptation of the economic system:* To what extent is climate change precipitated by failures in the economic system? How can excessive consumption be reduced and resources re-directed towards poverty alleviation, employment creation and sustainable resource management?
- *Intergenerational responsibilities:* How can agreement be reached on the value and desired quality of life of future generations, i.e. how much money, time and resources are countries willing to invest now in mitigation and adaptation measures to benefit future generations?
- *Access to scientific knowledge:* Is access to scientific knowledge on climate change a universal right? If so, how can this knowledge be translated into necessary adaptation and mitigation strategies?



A principle-based approach

The advantage of a principle-centered approach is that it helps to establish and prioritize goals against a complex backdrop of economic, social and political considerations and makes explicit the values underlying analyses and decision-making. In addition, the articulation and application of relevant principles highlights a vision of development in which material progress serves as a vehicle for social, ethical, and cultural advancement. Building on the principles put forward in the 1992 United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change and guided by the vision of a just and sustainable global community, we offer the following principles for consideration by the international community in their consultations regarding climate change policy:

- *International solidarity.* The principle of solidarity is not merely a call to international cooperation; rather, its implications extend to the administrative, economic, and social structures of society; while today, these structures are predominantly reflective of a nationalistic, divided world, the principle of international solidarity underlines the fundamental interconnectedness between the conditions and fate of nations and peoples. This principle represents the latest stage in the evolution of forms of human administration, an evolution that had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, the constitution of the city-state, and, eventually, independent and sovereign states. A recognition that the relationship between states is akin to the organs of the human body – each with its own responsibilities yet with a larger purpose of contributing to the well-being of the whole – would profoundly transform decision-making concerning climate change.
- *Universal access to education.* Education has the potential to inject nearly limitless intellectual resources into the climate change arena – to bring the experience and insight of men and women from diverse geographic regions to bear on the problem at hand. In order to do this, education programs should strive to develop an integrated set of capabilities – technical, scientific, artistic, social, moral and spiritual – so that individuals can lead lives with meaning, can understand the relationship between individual choices and the effects on climate change, and actively participate in the transition to a sustainable development pathway. Second, a more knowledgeable and educated population will drive debate and demand just action where climate change is concerned, ultimately expressing their views through the election of trustworthy leaders who will represent their attitudes and aspirations at the global level. In this regard, the media will play a critical role in disseminating accurate and timely information regarding climate change concerns.
- *Gender equality.* Men and women contribute to and experience climate change differently, as determined by their differing social roles and responsibilities, labor, individual choices and behaviors as well as access to resources. Taking gender into account helps to determine the full set of causes and potential effects of climate change. Because the majority of those living in poverty are women and the children they care for, they are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change and, at the same time, are grossly underrepresented in decision-making at the community, national and international levels where energy, climate-change, and sustainable development is concerned.

The Bahá'í International Community hopes to generate and contribute to a discussion about the ethical dimensions of climate change, including scientific, religious and policy perspectives. In doing so, we hope to unearth and examine the ethical questions underlying scientific and economic arguments in order to generate the will and the momentum to respond to this pressing global issue in a just and effective manner.