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QUESTION OF A CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the Baha'i International Community,
a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

The drafting of a Convention on the Rights of the Child, currently being undertaken under the aegis of the Commission on Human Rights, is an endeavour of the highest importance. While it is primarily directed towards protecting the child, assuring his welfare in every aspect of his life and guaranteeing him his fundamental human rights, it can also, in the view of the Bahá'í International Community, make a contribution of vital significance to the advancement of humanity as a whole towards its goal of universal justice, peace and order.

It is clear and evident that universal justice, peace and order cannot be achieved by force, nor imposed upon the world by legislative instruments. It is equally clear that formal, scholastic education - once regarded as the panacea for all the world's ills - is not, by itself, capable of ridding the world of hatred, prejudice, greed and oppression.

It is only through the acquisition and exercise of spiritual qualities - qualities such as mercy, tolerance, honesty, trustworthiness, unselfishness, compassion and love - that the peoples of the world will finally achieve the longed-for goals towards which humanity is striving.

Spiritual qualities are not innate in human beings, but every person is born with the capacity to acquire them. Those qualities must be taught, fostered and developed - and they will best take root if they are taught from earliest childhood.

"Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green: they will grow in whatever way you train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will ease their beams like brilliant candles on the world, will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of humankind." ^{*/}

It is the Bahá'í view, essential that every child receive spiritual education. Such education is not the formal, scholastic education referred to in article 16 of the revised draft Convention - although universal compulsory education is indispensable to the progress of mankind. Nor does spiritual education mean compulsory religious education. Spiritual education is the education of the spirit - the education of the inner person - and concerns the acquisition and development of those spiritual qualities which are essential for the orderly progress of society and for the achievement of harmony and peace. The lawlessness, disorder and aggression currently afflicting world society result, not from lack of formal education or book learning, but from lack of spiritual education.

"Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess ... Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."

It is of the greatest importance that the child receive spiritual education both from his parents and from his teachers. A boy or girl who receives both spiritual and scholastic education is given the capacity to realize his or her full potential and to contribute positively and beneficially to society.

^{*/} All passages quoted are from the Bahá'í Writings.

"As to the education of children, exert every effort to further this; it is of the utmost importance. So too, the education of girls ... For mothers are the first educators of the child, and every child at the beginning of life is like a fresh and tender branch in his parents' hands. His father and mother can train him in any way they choose."

"As to the organization of the schools ... the children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well behaved. They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well ..."

"Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than booklearning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well behaved - even though he be ignorant - is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light."

Since the ideas outlined in this statement are, in the view of the United International Community, of incalculable significance in terms of the evolution of world society, we feel that a convention on the rights of the child should contain provisions specifically designed to promote the spiritual education of the child. Indeed, we would go further and say that the child has a right to be so educated, for it is only through such education that he can realize his full human potential - and it is only through such education that peace and justice can ultimately be secured for all.

"Every child is potentially the light of the world, and at the same time its darkness ... Therefore make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that upon one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity."