



## **Embracing Interdependence and the Oneness of Humanity as Foundational Paradigms for Global Governance**

Speech by the Bahá'í International Community at a side event of the Human Dimension Committee meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the role of religious and faith communities in strengthening multilateral cooperation.

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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Many thanks to the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship and to Dr. Palaver for convening and organising this conversation.

The multilateral system and the institutions that sustain it were created at a particular moment in history and on the basis of particular assumptions. If we look carefully at how these institutions came into being, those assumptions become visible.

There are, of course, different narratives about the origins of institutions such as the United Nations. One reading emphasizes the aspiration to promote unity among the family of nations. The Charter of the United Nations declares its purpose to be the "saving of succeeding generations from the scourge of war." There was, undeniably, a lofty vision at its foundation.

Yet to see this aspiration toward unity as the sole driver of the post-war multilateral project would overlook the political realities of the time. These institutions were also shaped by an adversarial logic. The United Nations Charter itself referred to "enemy states," reflecting the geopolitical context in which it was drafted. This raises an important question: to what extent were these institutions conceived as a genuine community of nations, and to what extent were they designed to preserve political influence, economic primacy, or particular systems of values?

We find this same tension in other multilateral institutions. The Helsinki Process, which eventually gave rise to the OSCE, embodied a sincere aspiration toward dialogue, cooperation, and common security. As we meet today under the auspices of the OSCE, it is worth recalling that this process was also profoundly influenced by the strategic calculations of competing blocs.

Recognizing this complexity does not diminish the achievements of these institutions. Rather, it reminds us that every human system is built upon particular assumptions and values. And like all human creations, institutions undergo a process of aging. The question before us is whether the assumptions that brought humanity to this stage of political organization remain sufficient for the realities of our time.

Today, humanity has advanced remarkably, yet we continue to organize ourselves through increasingly narrow conceptions of "us." We tend to understand and organize human society through competing identities: the wealthy and the poor, the West and the East, one religion and another, one nation and the next. These identities have undoubtedly provided forms of belonging, protection, and political organization. Yet they also carry an inherent risk. In dividing ourselves into ever narrower groups, we lose sight of the common denominator that unites us as members of a shared human family.

The patterns of division that characterize human society are mirrored in the structure of the international system. The international order remains deeply rooted in the principle of state sovereignty, with governments expected above all to pursue the interests of their own populations. Yet many of the defining challenges of our century—climate change, migration, technological governance, pandemics, and peace itself—do not recognize national borders.

There is therefore a profound paradox. We seek to build unity among nations while remaining attached to a conception of humanity that is fundamentally fragmented. If the challenges we face are increasingly shared, then the principles by which we organize ourselves must also evolve.

The Bahá'í International Community has long suggested that such a principle exists: the oneness of humanity.

This principle neither abolishes nations nor diminishes the richness of humanity's diverse cultures, traditions, and identities. Instead, it places them within a wider conception of human reality, one in which the well-being of every people is inseparable from the well-being of the whole. From this perspective, the growing interdependence of the modern world is not merely a practical condition to be managed but a social reality that should increasingly shape the norms, institutions, and patterns of cooperation that govern international life.

Perhaps this principle, also helps us explain why we are witnessing a renewed appeal of nationalism and souveranism in many parts of the world. Humanity stands between paradigms. The next organizing vision has not yet fully emerged, and in moments of uncertainty we naturally seek refuge in what is familiar. We return to previous forms of political organization because they offer a sense of certainty.

Yet the deeper question remains whether the assumptions that brought humanity to this stage are capable of carrying us into the future.

The Bahá'í International Community has proposed that the principles of interdependence and the oneness of humanity should increasingly become foundational to the future development of the multilateral system. Such a shift requires recognizing the limitations of conceptions of sovereignty that cannot adequately respond to an interconnected world. It also requires acknowledging that multilateralism, despite its considerable achievements, still bears traces of an adversarial logic inherited from an earlier era.

Where, then, does religion fit into this conversation? There are at least two dimensions that can be pointed here:

The first concerns the normative example that religious communities themselves provide.

We cannot reasonably expect the international order to embody principles of cooperation, unity, and mutual trust if religious communities are themselves unable to cultivate these qualities. The same

challenges arise whenever any community claims a monopoly on truth, seeks to impose its understanding upon others, or limits itself to peaceful coexistence without developing genuine relationships of collaboration, solidarity, and shared purpose.

Much therefore depends upon religious leadership. How do we speak about other religions? Do our language and narratives subtly reinforce forms of othering? How can we move beyond continually emphasizing differences in doctrine, ritual, and tradition, and instead deepen our appreciation of the aspirations and values that unite humanity? How can we foster this conversation within society itself?

If we hope that nations will eventually transcend narrow nationalism, then we too must overcome every form of othering at the human level.

The second dimension concerns the contribution religion can make to public discourse.

Religion should not seek to replace public institutions, nor should religious communities imagine that they possess complete answers to the complex challenges facing humanity. Religion has potentially the capacity to invite society to revisit assumptions and underlying values and assumptions upon which our institutions are built.

As we rethink the future architecture of multilateralism, how might we draw more fully upon the moral and spiritual insights accumulated across humanity's religious traditions?

This also requires a profound shift in attitude. Religious communities cannot remain inward-looking or primarily concerned with their own preservation. They must participate actively in the broader conversation about the wellbeing of society as a whole. The concern of religion cannot be only for one people, one nation, or one community. It must embrace all humanity. As the Bahá'í writings express it, every soul should become a well-wisher of humankind. We must guard in order to avoid replacing the tribalism of nations with a tribalism of faith. Doing so would merely reproduce the same patterns under different labels.

A genuine recognition of global interdependence requires authentic concern for every human being, without distinction. Deceptively simple though this principle may appear, it demands a profound reordering of our priorities.

Too often, the common good is treated as a secondary objective—something desirable, but only after narrower interests have first been secured. Yet if humanity is truly one, then concern for the common good cannot remain secondary. It must become foundational.

Ultimately, the renewal of multilateralism will depend not only upon institutional reform, but upon a deeper recognition of our shared oneness and our growing interdependence.

Thank you.