

Australian Bahá'í Community

24 June 2002

Mr Grant Harrison
Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Harrison,

Thank you for your letter of 13 June 2002 inviting comment on any aspect of Australia's relationship with the United Nations (UN) and providing an opportunity to update or amplify information provided in the Australian Bahá'í Community's submission to the earlier inquiry.

We congratulate the Committee on its extensive report and particularly its proposal to ensure a sound and accurate knowledge among Australians of the work of the UN and Australia's role in it through annual public hearings.

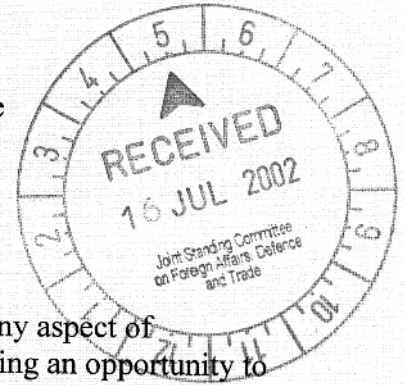
Since the Committee's earlier inquiry, terrible tragedies have afflicted humanity, including the terrorist attack in September last year on innocent people and their families in the United States and the ongoing violence and conflict in the Middle East. These events have particularly impinged on our sense of security as a nation as well as drawing us into conflicts in other parts of the world. This period has also seen the useful work of the UN World Conference Against Racism overshadowed by disagreements on one or two highly contentious issues. Events and difficulties such as these continue to illustrate how divisions in the human family paralyse our efforts to address shared problems through the UN and other avenues.

The Bahá'í Community believes that making constructive progress requires the recognition and application of the principle of the oneness of humanity. Until the oneness of humanity is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solution, through the UN or any other channel, because all of the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional.

The reality is that there is only the one human race. We are a single people, inhabiting the planet Earth, one human family bound together in a common destiny. Recognition of this reality should be the guiding principle behind the discussions, deliberations and ultimate output of the UN.

Over the years, in statements to the UN, the Bahá'í International Community has supported or called for specific actions in support of human oneness, including:
-- The widespread promotion of international educational campaigns that would teach the organic oneness of humankind, urging specifically that the UN itself facilitate such an effort, involving national and local governments, as well as non-governmental organizations.

Submission No 12



-- The widespread ratification of -- and adherence to -- international instruments, which represent humankind's collective conscience, that might contribute to a comprehensive legal regime for combating racism and racial discrimination, especially the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

-- The worldwide promotion of human rights education, with the aim of creating a "culture of human rights."

In our original submission, the Australian Bahá'í Community addressed the application of the principles of federalism to the UN. Attachment to the concept of national sovereignty has thus far prevented the General Assembly developing into an institution that truly reflects the will of the people - which is a true forum for the promulgation of law and which is truly representative of humanity at large. We reiterate our belief that Australia, as a nation that has exemplified the benefits of federalism, is well-placed to advocate those values and methods at international level that have served Australia so well at national, state and local level. Given the increasing influence of international organisations, it is clear that if the UN is to have greater legitimacy in the eyes of Australians and the citizens of other nations, the General Assembly and its voting structure, as well as reflecting the state system, must come to represent more accurately the people of the world.

The Australian Baha'i Community hopes that through its relationship with the UN, as well as more generally, Australia may be a leader in the emergence of a world which gives better expression to our common humanity; a world that is free of racism, terrorism and other global afflictions.

Once again, we congratulate the Committee on its report. We remain interested in being kept informed of the Committee's ongoing work.

Yours faithfully,



Michael Curtotti
Executive Officer - Government Relations