International Law in a Divided World: Back to the Future?[1]

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Abstract
A world civilization founded on justice is at the core of a Bahá'í vision of the future. The historical evolution of international law has been shaped by both the unprecedented violence and globalization of the modern age. Despite significant progress in the proliferation of global norms and international courts, the prevailing order remains "lamentably defective," and the entrenchment of divisive ideologies and power politics has become a cause for alarm. Yet even at a moment of apparent setback for international law, global interdependence continues to intensify; it will eventually force humankind to radically transform the prevailing order into one that is suited for our common survival.

Résumé
Une civilisation mondiale fondée sur la justice est au cœur de la vision bahá'íe de l'avenir. L'évolution historique du droit international a été façonnée à la fois par la violence et par la mondialisation sans précédent de l'ère moderne. Malgré des progrès significatifs dans la multiplication des normes mondiales et des tribunaux internationaux, l'ordre actuel demeure « lamentablement déficient », et l'enracinement d'idéologies clivantes et d'une politique de la force est devenu source d'inquiétude. Pourtant, même en cette période de recul apparent du droit international, l'interdépendance mondiale continue de s'accroître; elle finira par contraindre l'humanité à transformer radicalement l'ordre actuel en un ordre adapté à notre survie commune.

Resumen
Una civilización mundial fundada sobre la justicia está en el centro de la visión Baha'i del futuro. La evolución histórica de la ley internacional se ha moldeado por tanto la violencia sin precedente como la globalización de la edad moderna. A pesar de un significativo progreso en la proliferación de normas globales y cortes internacionales, el orden imperante se mantiene "lamentablemente defectuoso", y el atrincheramiento de las ideologías divisivas y la política basada en el poder se ha convertido en una causa de alarma. No obstante, en un momento de aparente revés para la ley internacional, la interdependencia global se sigue intensificando; y, en algún momento, obliga a la humanidad a transformar radicalmente el orden imperante en uno adecuado para nuestra supervivencia común.

I am honored to address the 50th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies. These gatherings have been an important feature of my intellectual development since my student days. The inspiring and provocative lectures by learned scholars over the years profoundly shaped my understanding of the connection between the

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Bahá'í writings and the condition of the world. There was a growing awareness in late childhood and adolescence that beyond memorizing prayers and studying *The Dawn-Breakers* at the insistence of my parents, and beyond annoying my Sunday school teacher or misbehaving at the Nineteen Day Feast with my mischievious cousins, and even beyond the more serious experience of communal worship and mystical reflection, there was a bigger picture, a greater vision in the Faith that remained to be explored. It was thrilling to discover during studies at university that the principle of the oneness of humankind translated into a unified world civilization, and that this vision of the future was not merely a lofty aspiration, but rather an inexorable historical process and revolutionary political manifesto; a profound reimagining and radical transformation of the human condition and of the very conception of society.

Most of the intellectual pioneers I learned from at the first conferences I attended are long gone, but they had a profound influence on many of us, and their legacy lives on in our contemporary scholarship and discourse as we gather here today. What has remained with me through the years is the importance of re-imagining the very idea of knowledge and learning; of replacing the hubris of intellectual élites with the humility of servitude to humanity; of infusing theoretical abstractions with spiritual reflection; and above all the importance of appreciating that the oneness of humankind at the core of our beliefs is born not in the privileged seclusion of the ivory tower, but in the arena of suffering and injustice that it is our sacred mission and life's work to address.

This brings me to some reflections on today's theme: "International Law in a Divided World: Back to the Future?" Many of us in this room will remember from our youth the earth-shaking "Promise of World Peace" issued to the peoples of the world by the Universal House of Justice in October 1985. At the height of the Cold War's ideological divide, under the shadow of nuclear war, this statement proclaimed that "[w]orld peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, 'the planetization of mankind'" (1). That great thinker was the French Jesuit philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In his 1945 essay "La planétisation humaine," written shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, he described the irresistible tide of globalization shaped by what he called "the closed shape of the earth, the mechanics of generation and the psychic properties of human matter" (de Chardin 129). "Economically and psychically" he wrote, "the entire mass of Mankind, under the inexorable pressure of events and owing to the prodigious growth and speeding up of the means of communication, has found itself seized in the mould of a communal existence." Other thinkers had similar ideas, like the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who maintained in 1962

long before the internet revolution, that "we now live in a global village of our own making" (*Medium* 63)—what he called a "simultaneous happening" created by electronic media, "at once as wide as the planet and as small as a little town where everybody is maliciously engaged in poking his nose into everybody else's business" (*This Is Marshall McLuhan*). None could have imagined then how the emergence of the all-encompassing cyberspace that we take for granted today would accelerate this vision of the future global village, and its fragility under the shadow of the algorithm apocalypse and artificial intelligence.

This was the *zeitgeist*—the "spirit of the time"—in the early days of the Association for Bahá'í Studies. It was appealing for the Bahá'í thinker in search of reassuring signs of humankind's new consciousness and its coming of age to find kindred spirits among intellectuals, and an increasing acceptance of the idea of a world civilization founded on spiritual principles. Shoghi Effendi's well-known letter of 11 March 1936, published under the title "The Unfoldment of World Civilization," comes to mind. It provides a thrilling vision of the future, which he describes as "a world civilization such as no mortal eye hath ever beheld or human mind conceived" (*World Order* 206). In the same year that witnessed the fascist alliance of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and the beginning of the Spanish Civil War—and just as humankind was sleepwalking into the Second World War—he reminded us that the "[u]nification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching" (202). In Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic words in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, written within the walls of 'Akká in Ottoman Syria some sixty years earlier in 1873: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. . . . Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead" (¶ 181).

The revolutionary vision of a future world commonwealth, in which a Supreme Tribunal would adjudicate disputes under international law and enforce its judgments through a system of collective security; a new world order founded on justice instead of ruinous wars and the oppression of ruthless tyrants. These compelled many in my generation to study international law. We couldn't have chosen a better time to pursue such a career. It was a time of great promise for the rule of international law. I recall that at my graduation in June 1990, the commencement speaker was German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. He celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, forty-five years after the conclusion of the Second World War—a once unimaginable event. The following year, in 1991, the dissolution of the once seemingly invincible Soviet Union brought the Cold War to an end—another previously unimaginable event. In the same year, multinational forces liberated Kuwait pursuant to a UN Security Council mandate—a

remarkable example of collective security in response to Saddam Hussein's war of aggression.

In 1992, the Rio Earth Summit adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, a remarkable experiment in global governance of the environment. In 1993, the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union, an unprecedented experiment in regional integration among nations there were once in a state of perpetual war. In the same year, Israel and the PLO concluded the Oslo I Accord, and peace in the Middle East seemed finally within reach. Also in 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague was established by the UN, where I had the privilege to serve as a prosecutor at the beginning of my career. It was the first post-Nuremberg tribunal for the prosecution of those most responsible for "ethnic cleansing" and other crimes against humanity. In that same year the World Wide Web was introduced, shrinking the world like never before. We would begin to witness the introduction of new terms into our global vocabulary such as Hotmail and Google, Zoom and Amazon, Facebook and Instagram. Henceforth, cultural progress became synonymous with duck face selfies on social media!

In 1994, apartheid ended with the election of Nelson Mandela as president of a multiracial South Africa, a once unimaginable peaceful transition accompanied by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In the same year, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea—the Constitution of the Oceans—entered into force, together with NAFTA, the Energy Charter Treaty, and the rise of investment arbitration. These were followed in 1995 by the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), reflecting the burgeoning globalization of the economy, especially with the rapid integration of China and Russia. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty was adopted in 1996, the same year that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its landmark Advisory Opinion on the Legality of Nuclear Weapons, just as the Cold War threat of nuclear war receded into a distant memory of an unfortunate past. In 1997, the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel land mines was adopted, and the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines won the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1998, some fifty years after the prosecution of Nazi leaders before the Nuremberg Tribunal, the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was finally adopted at the Rome Diplomatic Conference; the same year saw the landmark Akayesu judgment on genocide by the UN Rwanda Tribunal. In 1999, the NATO humanitarian intervention in Kosovo gave rise to the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, a moral re-definition of sovereignty championed by Canada, while in the same year the United Kingdom House of Lords held that former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet did not enjoy sovereign immunity for acts of torture conducted during his military rule.

Reflecting this age of flourishing idealism, at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, visionary Czech President Václav Havel went so far as to propose a UN Parliamentary Assembly that would democratize global governance. It was an extraordinary moment. The idea of a world commonwealth was being seriously proposed by a notable European Head of State. The UN he urged should "quickly change from a scene of clashes among particular interests of various states into a platform of joint, solidarity based, decision-making—by the whole of humankind—on how best to organize our stay on this planet." Challenging the State-centric international order, he maintained that the world body "should transform itself from a large community of governments, diplomats and officials into a joint institution for each inhabitant of this planet . . . in order that, on the authority of the people, it looks for ways toward a lasting well-being of the humanity and toward a genuine quality of life" (Havel). This coincided with the landmark report on the reform of the UN by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, entitled: "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century." This unique momentum at the dawn of a new millennium, preceded by the remarkable developments of the 1990s, portended the consummation of the seismic shift from State-centric to human-centric conceptions of international law that had emerged in the post-1945 UN Charter era.

These are but glimpses of the transformative historical period that some deemed the triumph of a rule-oriented liberal international order, sustained by accelerating interdependence, and guaranteed by American hegemony. For many Bahá'ís, these developments were hopeful signs of the Lesser Peace, and the irresistible advancement of a world civilization towards the Most Great Peace.[2] For those like myself who were young international lawyers, it heralded a new chapter in the evolution of the global order into a robust world commonwealth. We had learned in university the famous statement of professor Louis Henkin, that even without a world legislature or executive, or the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ to adjudicate disputes, the international legal order was viable because "almost all nations observe almost all principles of international law and almost all of their obligations almost all of the time" (47). Now, amidst accelerating interdependence and technological transformation, it seemed that this habitual lawfulness among nations was becoming so deeply internalized and entrenched, and the prospect of UN reform so imminent, that the war and chaos that had characterized every prior era would soon become a thing of the past. Human rights and democratic ideals, free market economies fueled by the radical efficiency of online digital platforms—these currents were

2 Shoghi Effendi explains that whereas "The Lesser Peace" refers to the unity of nations, "The Most Great Peace, refers to "the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations"(*World Order* 163).

spreading rapidly across the world, creating both global prosperity and a universal ethos, transcending diverse civilizations and geopolitical rivalries. Professor Francis Fukuyama described it as the "end of history." It was, some would say, an intoxicating moment.

But now we are sober; only the hangover remains.

A quarter of the way through the twenty-first century, that promise of international law and UN reform seems a distant memory. We have gone from euphoria to existential angst. From the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 to the war on terror and torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay; the shocking return of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 and the imposition of gender apartheid against women and girls; the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the threats of a nuclear exchange with NATO; the horrors of October 7, 2023 in Israel and the heartbreaking devastation of Gaza; the mass-murder and starvation of civilians in Sudan's Darfur and Ethiopia's Tigray region; resurgent tariff wars and the dysfunction of the WTO; the US withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change; the abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro; sanctions against the ICC and the stated intention of the US to dismantle the Court "brick by brick" (Rubio); and now the highly destructive war between the United States and Israel and Iran, which has pulled in the Gulf Arab States, destablizing the entire Middle East amidst questions about stockpiles of enriched uranium. In all these destructive currents we witness the chaos of war and nationalism and hateful sectarianism, the resurgence of great power rivalry and authoritarianism, and the spread of corruption and cynicism in the political realm, marking what many perceive as a steep decline of the rules-based order. These days, international law conferences increasingly resemble collective therapy sessions; instead of fantasizing about UN reform and world peace, we are now preparing for the zombie apocalypse!

In the words of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in his famous speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos on 20 January of this year, the "bargain" that was *Pax Americana* "no longer works. . . . We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition." Instead of the visionary idealism of President Havel and talk of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, we now speak at best of what Prime Minister Carney calls "value-based realism." We must engage with open eyes, he warns us, and see "the world as it is" and not as "we wish it to be." How did we get to this point? What was the nature of the "rules-based order" we have left behind, and should we be hoping—as some have suggested—to go back to the future, and retrieve that liberal order which seemed so promising in the 1990s? Otherwise, what does the future hold for the evolution of international law, which has often made the most radical progress in moments of crisis and catastrophe?

It is instructive here to revisit the famous letter of Shoghi Effendi, dated 28 March 1941 and published in *The Promised Day is Come*—a letter that profoundly shaped my thinking as a student attending the Association's Conferences some forty years ago. We have heard it before, but it takes on a different meaning in light of current circumstances. "The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny," he writes. "The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole" (122). It must be remembered that he was writing this in 1941, a year that saw Nazi Germany invade the Soviet Union with three million soldiers, the largest massacre of the Holocaust at Babi Yar near Kyiv, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. It was at this historical juncture that he reminded us that "the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has, in His own words, '*lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction*' to this vast process now operating in the world. The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men's failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation." And he warned us: "Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible" (122–23).

This is a familiar theme for scholars of international law, namely that of calamity as the catalyst for the progressive development of the international legal order. The Napoleonic wars gave rise to the 1815 Congress of Vienna among the major European powers, followed by the wider gathering of twenty-six nations from across the world at the 1899 Hague Peace Conference at which the Permanent Court of Arbitration was established, and The Hague Convention on Land Warfare was adopted. The First World War gave rise to the League of Nations, including the Permanent Court of International Justice, and the 1928 General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy—the so-called Kellogg-Briand Pact concluded in Paris by the American and French Foreign Ministers. And of course, the prosecution of crimes against humanity under the 1945 Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the prohibition of war under the UN Charter, both adopted in 1945, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, both adopted in 1948, the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict—these were all responses to the unprecedented horrors of the

Second World War and the Holocaust. In later years, the evils of colonialism and racial supremacy would give rise to the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in 1960, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965, and subsequently, the adoption in 2007 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—an instrument with far-reaching consequences on both jurisprudence and the reconciliation process in Canada. Similarly, it was the horrors of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s that created the impetus for the establishment of the ICC. These examples are all expressions of the dialectic between extreme violence and suffering on the one hand, and the increasing ambition of international law on the other; an iterative process between dystopian realities and utopian aspirations, a regimagining of the human condition.

Before all these developments could be imagined, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Tablet of the World: "The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective" (*Tablets* 171). Perhaps the order today is somewhat less "lamentably defective," but it is still far short of the vision of a unified world civilization. So what will it take for humankind to take the next great leap forward, given this pattern of calamity as catalyst for progress? Here we return to the statement in *The Promise of World Peace* that world peace is not only possible, but inevitable. It is a reassuring statement, until we read what follows: "Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible" (1).

I would like to reflect on this statement in light of what is among the most consequential developments in our collective history, and one that has shifted international law away from questions of war and peace towards other priorities. This is a phenomenon that was not apparent when *The Promise of World Peace* was issued in 1985. It emerged in public consciousness just three years later, in 1988, in the historic testimony of Dr. James Hansen before the United States Senate, in which he popularized the term "global warming." Greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels were resulting in atmospheric temperature rise and climate change. By 1992, at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change had been adopted to address this emerging existential threat to our collective future. In 2015, the Paris

Agreement committed the international community to maintaining temperature rise to within 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures. This was consistent with the scientific consensus that temperature rise beyond this threshold would exponentially increase the risk of catastrophic harm arising from climate change. The model of global governance that was adopted to achieve this objective in pursuit of the common interest involved so-called "Nationally Determined Contributions" whereby each State would unilaterally determine its emission targets on the path to net zero. Unfortunately, because of the manifest failure to achieve what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls "deep, rapid, and sustained" reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the current policies are such that the earth's temperature is projected to rise by 3.2°C, more than twice the maximum threshold specified by the Paris Agreement. Such a rise would result in a dystopian future, a death sentence for climate vulnerable states in the "global South." There is no solution for this grim reality except genuine political will leading to the establishment of the necessary global institutions.

In view of the failure of the so-called COP process (Conference of the Parties) to achieve sufficient progress, Small Island States facing existential threats from sea-level rise and extreme weather events turned from empty promises to binding international law. In particular, Antigua and Barbuda in the Caribbean, and Tuvalu and Vanuatu in the South Pacific, together with several others, initiated advisory proceedings before international courts and tribunals to determine the exact obligations of those States most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, under the "no-harm" and human rights principles of international law. It was an unprecedented exercise in planetary politics, the smallest of nations rising to the greatest of challenges for our common survival. Tuvalu, a UN Member State, has some 10,000 Indigenous inhabitants, and the main island, Funafuti, is just one square mile. The ancestral territory of these people, on a low-lying atoll that they consider to be sacred, will most likely be submerged under the waves in the near future. At a time when the air in Toronto and New York often becomes too toxic to breathe because of massive forest fires in northern Ontario, and when numerous people die in heat waves in London and Paris, Tuvalu is like the canary in the coal-mine of climate catastrophe, a warning of what is to come for all humankind if we fail to change course.

There were two historic proceedings in which I had the privilege of representing the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law. The first hearing was before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg, Germany. It concerned the protection of the marine environment against temperature rise, bearing in mind that the oceans absorb more than 90% of excess heat and regulate the climate

system by distribution of cold and hot water around the planet. At the hearing, the Attorney General of Vanuatu, Kiel Arnold Loughman, addressed the Tribunal in these words: "We know from ancient wisdom that if we respect the Earth, then the Earth will respect us" ("Obligations of States" 18). It was both a reminder of our place in creation—an insignificant speck in an infinite universe—and of the miraculous balance that has allowed for human existence on earth in an otherwise inhospitable universe. His words represented the convergence between the ancient wisdom of Indigenous peoples and modern scientific truth; a reminder of the sacred and the spiritual, in a secular technologically advanced world consumed by the narcissistic delusion that somehow we are on top of the world, rather than being a part of it. In May 2024, the Tribunal's twenty-one judges rendered a unanimous opinion spelling out the obligation of States to preserve and protect the marine environment against climate change by keeping within the 1.5°C threshold.

The next proceeding was in the Hague before the ICJ, the principal judicial organ of the UN. An unprecedented one hundred states and international organizations participated, including Indigenous nations from the South Pacific. I recall an Indigenous lawyer asking me whether it would be proper to appear before the Court wearing a traditional crown of sea-shells. I responded that it would certainly not be any worse than an English barrister's wig! In its unanimous advisory opinion delivered in December 2025, the Court described climate change as "an existential problem of planetary proportions that imperils all forms of life and the very health of our planet" ("Obligations of States" ¶ 456). It held in this light that States have legally binding obligations to protect the climate system, limit global warming to 1.5°C, and prevent significant environmental harm. This was an application of the "no-harm" principle, enunciated in the 1941 Trail Smelter Arbitration between Canada and the United States in which the Tribunal held that Canada was liable for damage caused to neighbouring Washington State by the noxious fumes of a smelter in British Columbia. In this regard, the Climate Change Opinion of 2025 specifically held that "failure . . . to take appropriate action to protect the climate system from GHG emissions—including through fossil fuel production, fossil fuel consumption, the granting of fossil fuel exploration licences or the provision of fossil fuel subsidies—may constitute an internationally wrongful act which is attributable to that State" (¶ 427). What is more, the Court also recognized that a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a fundamental precondition for the enjoyment of human rights such as the right to life, health, and an adequate standard of living.

This may well be the most consequential opinion in the history of the Court. To the extent that we still believe in a rules-based international order, this authoritative statement of

binding international law requires a far-reaching transformation of our policy goals and priorities, and audacious initiatives in global governance, however politically inconvenient that may be today. It is easy for the sophisticated cynic to dismiss this idea as unrealistic, not least at a time when multilateralism together with global respect for human rights and protection of the environment, have declined. But as the Indigenous Tuvaluans would remind us from their disappearing home in the South Pacific, what we are up against are the laws of nature, and in a contest with mother earth, we will certainly lose. As I concluded before the Court on behalf of Small Island States, in a statement inspired by the Bahá'í vision of organic unity: "The climate system does not recognize the artificial boundaries that we have created in our political imagination. There is one earth, one humankind, and one supreme law that none can escape, which is to live in harmony with nature, or to perish" ("Obligations of States" 25).

And this brings me back to the implications of this challenge for the future of humankind. Whereas in the past the notion of an interdependent planetary civilization would have been dismissed as naïve idealism—and espousing it would have been the surest way to be denied tenure at university for lack of cynical sophistication—it is today an obvious reality, inescapably imposed by the laws of nature. The question is how will humankind rise to the challenge amidst all the divisive ideologies and short-sighted geopolitics and devastating wars and atrocities that we witness today. In this regard, a remarkable letter of Shoghi Effendi in *Citadel of Faith* comes to mind. It is dated 28 July 1954, that is to say several years after the Second World War, and is published under the title "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril." He speaks in this letter of the "evil" of "crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society" (125). He goes on to observe that "[i]t is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men." He notes that "a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War, marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger

for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience." Thus, he makes clear that what we have witnessed in the past is but one stage in the "global havoc" which a heedless humanity will have to experience in order to open the way for the Greater Peace.

This brings us back to the euphoria that Professor Fukuyama described as the "end of history." This was the description of a then triumphant liberal order that despite its obvious benefits masked a corrosive culture of consumer capitalism and hyper-corruption. In recent times, this unbridled materialism has given rise to the oligarchy of tech billionaires and alarming concentrations of wealth and power—as Oxfam notes, the richest 1% now own more wealth than 95% of humanity. There are obvious connections between this obscene social inequality and the exploitation of the resulting despair by demagogical leaders who offer deceptive and divisive ideologies as a solution. The metastasization of this cancerous materialism has brought us to an historical juncture where our common survival depends not only on global cooperation and structural change, but also on radically changing our self-definition and way of life, our very conception of progress and the pursuit of happiness. Amidst what Carl Jung called a "psychic epidemic,"or collective psychosisan increasingly alienated, fragmented and unhinged culture is in need of a healing spiritual transformation—a post-modern rediscovery of the sacred together with communal belonging and living in harmony with nature. In other words, the world commonwealth and rule of international law, the prevalence of justice as the basis of a lasting peace, will be realized not merely through diplomatic exchanges and negotiation of treaties and convening of summits for UN reform, but rather, through a profound organic and grassroots transformation of our collective conscience and culture, born of the "global havoc" that Shoghi Effendi spoke of. It is, alas, a process of pain and suffering, but one that is the result of poor choices; namely, a continuing failure to embrace the inescapable realities and needs of our time.

In retrospect, it was an illusion to imagine that the triumph of a materialistic civilization in whatever shape or form—including the triumph of capitalism over communism—would usher in a utopia; it should have been obvious that the gospel of greed at whose alter we have worshipped would only lead to excess, corruption, and violence. The unraveling of the old world order that we witness today, together with the emergence of the new world order—the twin processes of integration and disintegration—are largely inevitable. The convulsions surrounding us are the result of choosing hubris over humility, of worshipping the ego and celebrating ignorance, leading invariably to the path of emptiness and confusion, chaos and violence. We must not be deterred by this historical process, as alarming as it may seem. Instead, we must busy ourselves with sowing the seeds in the fertile soil of an increasingly receptive collective conscience, so that they will in time allow a new awarness and new

institutions to take root and bear fruits. In fact, while our eyes are fixed on the speeches of powerful leaders and high-profile negotiations at UN conferences, the most immense revolutions are rooted in grassroots consciousness, in quotidian conversations among friends and family and the building of harmonious relations within communities that are ultimately reflected in the transformation of relations within and among nations. By assuming responsibility and participating actively in this process, we contribute directly to this on-going seismic shift, leading to the emergence of a new planetary civilization founded on recognition of the inescapable oneness of humankind, a civilization in which divisive ideologies will become the absurd relic of an immature and misguided past. We must remain confident that to persist on this path is to stand on the right side of history.

To conclude this reflection on the future of international law in a divided world, I recall the evocative image offered by one of the notable scholars in the early days of the Association's Conferences: that of the world as it seemed in the days of Ptolemaic astronomy, which conceived of a stationary earth at the centre of the universe around which the sun and planets revolved. This erroneous geocentric model shaped European thought for some 1,400 years until it was replaced by the Copernican heliocentric model, an astronomical theory that correctly placed the sun at the centre and the earth at the periphery. If ideas have far-reaching consequences, then our ideas about our place in the universe—about human nature and its potentialities—have the most far-reaching consequences. The displacement of narrow, narcissistic, and materialistic identities and ideologies that are oblivious to the spiritual dimension of our existence in this unique day, identities and ideologies that place our ego at the centre of the universe, are no less delusional than the misconceptions of the past about the place of the earth in the universe that we ridicule today. While the rule of international law has made modest progress amidst a materialistic civilization, that progress has been born of horrific violence and unspeakable anguish, or at best momentary pragmatic self-interest, and even then, the solutions have largely been mere palliatives and stop-gap measures rather than a genuine global framework appropriate for the needs of this age. But the time is coming, whether through volition or violence, when a spiritual consciousness and empathic culture will rise amidst the ruins of a materialistic civilization. As frightening as that eventuality may seem, as much as it will invariably result in confusion and suffering, it will also open the way for yet unimaginable transformations and potentialities; the building of a new world embracing the inextricable interdependence and oneness of humankind. "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away," Bahá'u'lláh reassure us, and "the 'Most Great Peace' shall come" (qtd. in Universal House of Justice 15).

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