

Bahai'i National Office of External Affairs

**P.O. Box 2142
Houghton 2041
10 Acorn Lane Houghton Fstate 2198**

The Chairperson of the Human Rights Violations Committee Truth and
Reconciliation Commission
P O Box 1158
Johannesburg 2000

15 September 1997

Dear Sir

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**SUBMISSION BY THE CHURCHES TO THE TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

Thank you for your letter which was addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of South Africa.

The Bahai Faith, the most recent of the independent world religions, originated in Persia in 1844 and today enjoys a world-wide following of some 6 million people.

In South Africa, Baha'is reside in some 900 communities. Although records indicate that the first Baha'i to live in South Africa arrived in 1911, there was little significant expansion until the 1950's when a number of Baha'i families came to this country from the United States, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and England to settle and to teach the Faith to South Africans.

The essential teachings of the Baha'i Faith focus on unity - the oneness of God, of religions and of humankind. Abhorring all forms of prejudice and rejecting any system of racial segregation, the Faith was taught during the *apartheid* years, on a one-to-one basis without publicity. Despite the nature of the politics of that time, the Baha'is presented their teachings on unity and the oneness of humankind to several State Presidents, including Presidents Botha and de Klerk. However, following guidance from the world centre of the Baha'i Faith,

Israel, the Bahais concentrated their general teaching efforts on the Black and Coloured people in the country.

During this period of gestation, the Bahai Faith was continually being watched by the security police. Both individual Baha'is and the administrative bodies were under police surveillance and investigation due to the racially integrated nature of the Baha'i communities. However, the numbers were too small and the activities too peaceful to be considered a threat to the government of the day.

The Baha'i community thus became a practical workshop for both spiritual and administrative growth and, there being no clergy in the Faith, all Baha'is learned the process of spiritually-based consultation, administering their communities without political affiliation and thus insuring their unity.

As authorised by the Baha'i World Centre, from 1985 onwards numerous statements were presented on an almost annual basis, either in response to proposed legislative changes, or with emphasis on the particular section of society to which they were directed. Among these were:

- Suggestions for a New Constitution
- Principles for a System of Education for South Africa
- Overcoming Racial Prejudice - South Africa's Most Challenging Issue
- The Prosperity of Humankind
- Turning Point for All Nations
- The Equality of Men and Women

Recently, at the request of various government departments and nongovernmental organisations, numerous clarifications of Baha'i teachings on current social issues such as capital punishment, abortion and others, have also resulted in consultations and presentations.

In conclusion, the Baha'is will continue to concentrate their efforts on the attainment of unity and, observing the strict teachings of their Faith, the avoidance of party politics and loyalty to government. They will thus strive to hasten the fulfillment of the words of Baha'illah, the Prophet-Founder of the Faith:

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and with its unity is firmly established.

Thank you for affording us the opportunity to make this submission to the Commission.

Yours faithfully

Brett Hone

Secretary

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's Of South Africa

Incorporated Association not for gain. Reg. No.,

P.O. BOX 2142, 21041, 10 Accrington, Hampshire, **Est-ited 219S**

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TO *LHE* -TRUM,

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The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of South Africa, on behalf of the

Bahai's we represent, is grateful for this opportunity to share with the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission

mission an understanding of the position and activities of the *Bahai's of South Africa* during the apartheid years

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to understand the nature of the response of the Bahai's to apartheid it is necessary to

understand the character of the Bahai's and the overall aims and objectives

and

the Bahai Faith, its role in the world -- 'global context in which it operates.

The Bahai Faith which is the most recent of the independent world religions

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six inilli,-.)n people, representing inore thart 2100 indivenout tjibes, roalces aM groups
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on unity - of God, of Religion and of humanity. The pivot around which all ot c

BahA'i teaChings revolve is that of the onetless of the hunian i.~ee. We believe that thi,~

is an essential reality of cre.~tioil. Its acceptance and application by the gener,,!ity o~

th.e peoples c)f the world is, not only attainable in this age but is the ~ole basis for'

-z;us~aitiable peace and security of humanity - the ~ery Kii3 * c, 1

' A, 3. 00m of God on irth as

f).fonilsed by all the Divin~- Revelations of the. past.

BaU'ls firinly helieve that this kingdoni will takne the form of a global society in 1
whi.ch all the rac~.,s, creeds and classes of the -,voj-ld are united as a single family. The,
building ol't't)J*s glolhal society is not, a mere outburst or ignorant emotionalism or an
expression of a vague and pious hope. It moves beyond a re awakening of the spirit
of broth~.t.hood and good~,All arnong men, and the fosterlpq of harmoiu'ous~
cooperation among individual peoples and cultures, This pursuit Calls for an. organic
change in'.the. structure of our present day society, a such as the. world has not
yet experienc~(!,

And it is towards this goal that *the BahA'i* Faith his been W(Aine, ~Slobally Since its
inception over a 153 yews ago - and *in South Aftica* since the 1950s. Our
actions~ were and remain based on an uiish~ikable acceptance opl tbo
spiiitUal nature of the individual and thereby the community *and*
that 1 religion is the c,,reatcst of all MC.MS for the establishment of order in the world
and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell

True to tWilk teacliiti,~, our approach has been and remains to build cQn-,munities which

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t.t~ive to put into daily pi.~,tice ffindamental spiritual aspirations such as love, honesty,
rmoderatio~ humility, hospitality, justice, morality, tru,-.bvorthiness ~ild - above all -unity,
thereby influencing change from the ~;round up. Without the irfu,,sion of these

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ValLia-'s into Society, no cor~im~: ~ however econon~c-ally prosperous or
etiiposv%-red or techn,) 'Aogica'tly can endure.

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.Faith was introduced on a one to one basis and the community qu,etly grey dul-ing
tile apartheid years, without publicity. Despite the nat-ure of the politics of that
tintle, we presented our teachings on unity and the oneness of humank-ind to
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individuals in politics, community and *awdenfla* and leaders of thought including State

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Presidents, Approaches to individuals and persons were pursued in order to

offer to South Africa a pathway to peace and justice for all its citizens.

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During the apartheid years, both individual Muslims and our administrative institutions

were continually watched by the security police. The and investigation

by the police was due to the racially integrated nature of the Bantustans and its

activities. However, it would appear that our numbers were too small and our

activities were not perceived as a real threat to the maintenance of the

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Our activities did not include opposition to the previous Government for

reasons explicitly prohibited by the

in partisan politics and opposition to South African

sacred Texts of our Faith as revealed by Allah, the Prophet-Messenger of our Faith,

even though that Government be suspicious of and ill-disposed to the Muslims and

activities of the Muslims as was the case in this country.

During the time when the previous Government prohibited integration within our communities, rather than divide into separate administrative structures for each population group, we opted to limit membership of the Muslim Administration to the black Muslims who remain in the majority of our membership and thereby placed the entire Muslim community under the stewardship of the Muslim Administration. Happily, such policies were eased and we were able to have racially integrated administrative

bodies which and are d.:niacratially elected by and froir the entire body of adult adher-ents of the Baha"i Faith.

In the nearly five decades since the BahA'i Faith was~ established in South Afrim through stdet adherence to the principles of our Prophet-Founder we have forged ahead and niade, a modest beeginning toward realising our vision of unity for South Affica by creabilg a model which can be studied and scrutemised and f~om which we believe valgable lossosns can be learnt. The systematic development of our huinall resouseet was and is a result of great emphasig on spiritual, inoral and ethical aspects of individual and the community life. These include the sanctity ofthc family unit, the importance of renderitig service to the community in Pursult of a craft or a profession *which* contributes towards prosperity and lend moxn6ntum to the elimination d'extrenles of poverty and weal,th, and the obligation tOeducate on-s children. The fundamental belief in the equality of nien and womert, from our teachings on the oneness of huiiu&,ind has ineant *that women in the Bah.'11 cotiitiuu,;ily have* always taken " active role in all aspets of the. work of the Faith, including riatj'orial In, dership positions.

The pursuit of our objectivos, ofunity and equality has not been without its costs. 'rho 1, white" Balifis were often ostracized by their whitto neighbours for their associatioll .i.,ith "non-whites" **IAINNELCL-** Balia"is. Were subjcted tO scorn by their blacY lffkatriots **for their l~litical** action end integration with **the61~ B a.** Tho~- niost tra_-c~c loA\$, rutAl 4*,breth.re ~omniurfity was the b *exci~,o~ "ur* adherents, at our plaOW-.,, j ~tgne-.,,g,0 0J11C iii *Umta"*

As w*e. move towards the new millennium, our objcti,,,e reniains wichanged and Our !l' vision reniains undimmed. Hoxv...Ver., our sense of urgeilcy to redlise this vision is rmore- acute. Whatever unf(>)ds in the years ahead ffi South Affica *and* the world, the. *BahA'is vrill continue* to endeavour to establish global and national unity through the infusion of spintual values at aE levels of society. By developing urufted communities throughout the land, wc offer the modtl for est*lishing peace in o,-,r country.

Again we thaftk you for j~ving us this opportunity.

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