

## **Choosing Our Collective Future: Behavioral and Social Change in an Age of Rapid Transition**

*A symposium organized by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development, DAVV and the  
School of Social Sciences, DAVV*

We live in a world of rapid social change where cultural standards, modes of behavior, values, and worldviews that sustained ethical life and social existence in the past are becoming increasingly outdated. The breathless pace of change caused by forces of globalization, urbanization, technological development and migration have placed enormous pressure on ethical systems, cultural codes, moral standards and spiritual worldviews that gave meaning to life, defined appropriate relationships among human beings and between humanity and nature, and instilled the commitment to moral behavior. The new realities of the contemporary world demand new patterns of thought and behavior for the individual and a transformation in the structures of society to reflect the implications of ethical and moral principles such as justice and unity in diversity in an increasingly interdependent world. In the face of the many economic, cultural and social transformations taking place, there is the need for a renewed sense of connection with one another, with the community, with society, with nature and eventually with the creator. Failure to achieve this harmony in relationships has led to a sense of anomie and anxiety discernible in large number of young people of the present generation. It manifests itself in an impaired form of psychological and social health which causes violence, delinquency, depression, a sense of alienation, loneliness and the rise in anti-social tendencies.

In the face of the force of change, the masses of people become passive victims of their circumstances, powerless to take constructive action to shape their individual and collective future in accordance with their chosen values and principles. Educational institutions have a major role to play in countering this passivity and instilling in new generations a strong commitment to fashion a future that is positive, constructive and based on a strong moral and ethical framework that is open and responsive to changing social conditions. The task before this generation is to design their collective future through consciously choosing to develop patterns of thought and behavior that are suitable to harmonious and just social existence and to transform social systems that are based on outdated values and principles and make them suited to the realities of the twenty first century world without, in the process, sacrificing moral principles.

This symposium organized by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development in collaboration with the School of Social Sciences, DAVV explores some of the implications of this theme.

Some of the questions that this symposium will seek to address are as follows:

- What are some of the moral and ethical principles that are suited to the realities of an interconnected and interdependent world that would allow people to lead socially and psychologically healthy lives and build social institutions and systems that are unifying and just?
- A vision of development that is focused solely on the individual, makes people indifferent and passive in relation to the needs of transforming society. How can the motivation and volition be generated in individuals to strive for the betterment of society while also exerting efforts to develop their own innate talents and capacities?

- The dominant influences shaping of today's society are either the world of politics or the domain of the market. While both these domains no doubt have had their positive roles to play in society, there is a deep concern that in the contemporary world they have turned into instruments for seeking self-interest, power, wealth and greed. How can these institutions of society become domains for stimulating and channeling the spirit of selfless service to society?
- What are some of the spaces in civil society that can foster the values of altruism, solidarity, justice and participation in the younger generation? In what ways can spaces on the internet and social media serve this purpose?