

PRESS RELEASE

The Baha'i International Community

Date: 25 February 2008

For immediate release

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**Noted economist to represent Baha'i International Community at
High Level Roundtable during 52nd session of Commission on the
Status of Women at the United Nations today**

NEW YORK (25 February 2008) -- Baha'i delegates from six continents will convene in New York this week for the annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Among them will be noted economist Augusto Lopez-Claros, formerly of the World Economic Forum.

Dr. Lopez-Claros and some 40 others, representing 15 national Baha'i affiliates and the Baha'i International Community (BIC) itself, will address the Commission's priority theme of "financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women," along with issues related to the advancement of women generally.

"The worldwide community of more than five million Baha'is, who have as one of their fundamental principles the belief that women and men are equal, believe that the Commission represents a major venue for addressing the advancement of women in the global arena," said Fulya Vekiloglu, director of the BIC's Office for the Advancement of Women.

"This year's theme focuses on what is undoubtedly one of the key action steps to promote women's advancement, inasmuch as programs for women and girls around the world are grossly underfunded and so fall short of their goals," said Ms. Vekiloglu, who is also a representative of the BIC to the United Nations.

Ms. Vekiloglu said the BIC was especially happy this year that Dr. Lopez-Claros would be addressing the Commission in a High Level Roundtable.

The roundtable, on the topic "Financing gender equality and the empowerment of women: Leadership for a sustainable future," will be held today from 3 to 6 p.m. in U.N. Conference Room 2. The event is co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Paraguay and Canada, along with the Baha'i International Community and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO).

Dr. Lopez-Claros is former chief economist at the World Economic Forum and director of the Global Competitiveness Report. In 2006, he founded EFD-Global Consulting Network, a consultancy advising governments and private corporations on economic, financial, and development issues.

Dr. Lopez-Claros, who is a Baha'i, will also speak at one of several parallel events sponsored or co-sponsored by the BIC. Themes of these side events include the role of NGOs in building sustainable capacity; faith-based responses to gender-based violence as an atrocity crime; and empowering women through meaningful work.

The other members of the Baha'i delegation also bring with them significant experience and expertise. Zarin Hainsworth is president of UNIFEM in her native Britain. Mehr Afhasi works with UNIFEM in Sweden. Shama Pande is with USAID of Nepal, working in the area of NGO funding. Forough Olinga of Uganda and Nalina Jiwnani of India represent the Baha'i offices for the advancement of women in their countries.

Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing, a Baha'i who has lived in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, will speak at a BIC-sponsored side event about global policy on Tuesday. She is a lawyer whose most recent service was with the Legal Advisor's Office of the U.S. State Department, and she is the author of *Collective Security Within Reach*, published last month.

Other Baha'i delegates are coming from as far away as Australia, Brazil, Canada, El Salvador, Germany, Hawaii, Japan, Malawi, Puerto Rico, and Switzerland.

The BIC has also issued a statement on the occasion of this year's Commission called "Mobilizing Institutional, Legal and Cultural Resources to Achieve Gender Equality." The statement recommends that governments could best facilitate efforts to finance for gender equality by taking a long-term view of the issue, working to align national budgets with human rights obligations, and engaging with religions which can help shape perceptions about women's role in society.

The statement suggests that because religious organizations have extensive networks and deeply felt influence on their followers, they can be instrumental in influencing government policy. It recommends that the world of finance and the world of religion form a kind of alliance of intention to bring to fruition the goals of an "ordered society."

"An equitable economic system is not possible without agreement about underlying values," the statement says, "and notions of ethics and values divorced from economic conditions will not be realized."

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