

# Forging a path to gender equality

The Bahá'ís of Botswana join our fellow countrymen in standing up in the fight against inhumane acts of violence against any members of our society. Gender based violence has become so deeply entrenched in the world. It is a symptomatic manifestation of a chronic disease affecting our society. The Bahá'í community believes that this disease from which our progress and prosperity is so severely crippled is, in part due to the failure to recognise the equality of men and women. "As such, the eradication of violence requires not only changes in law and policy, but more fundamental changes at the level of culture, attitudes and beliefs. Such changes must be grounded in the conviction that the equality of women and men is not only a goal to be achieved, but a truth about human nature to be acknowledged and embraced... The very essence of what makes us human is neither 'male' nor 'female.' ...equality goes beyond a tally of resources or a set of social norms. It reflects the nobility inherent in every human being," Bahá'í Holy Scriptures. In light of this, in order to eliminate gender-based violence completely, we as an entire community must collectively realize and embody the spiritual truth of this principle. The Bahá'í Holy Writings affirm that "women and men have been and always will be

equal in the sight of God".<sup>2</sup> Our community's prosperity is bound up with the equal participation of both men and women. For "the world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary."<sup>3</sup> The premise of the equality of men and women requires spiritual and moral education and translated action within our communities. These spiritual qualities of love, justice, equality, and compassion to name a few, should be taught and practiced at the core of our society, in the family home and in schools. Just over two centuries ago, and for the first time in the history of revealed religion, Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, proclaimed the equality of man and woman. He supported this principle by laws requiring the same standard of education for women as for men, and equality of rights in society.

Equality of the sexes is, for Bahá'ís, a spiritual and moral standard essential for the unification of the planet and the unfolding of world order. Without the qualities, talents, and skills of

both women and men, full economic and social development of the planet becomes impossible. The Bahá'í world community has, for more than one hundred years, accepted as truth the principle of equality of the sexes and has understood the importance of implementing this standard in individual, family, and community life. This unity and equality, rooted in the rights and responsibilities of every person before God, unfolds in the family. Here, values and attitudes essential for the development of the individual, the community, the nation, and humanity must be taught from early life. In the Bahá'í view the family being a human unit must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each the comfort of all; the honour of one the honour of all. Although both parents share in the overall responsibility of educating the children, the mother is given recognition as the first educator of humanity, and she must be carefully prepared for this task. Her education, in fact, from the Bahá'í point of view, is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she

be defective and imperfect herself the child will necessarily be deficient. A great responsibility is, however, placed on woman to develop her potentialities fully. She must make every effort to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment. Certainly, the well-being of mankind depends on the development of the potential virtues and abilities of every individual, regardless of race, nationality, class, religion, or sex. For this reason prejudices, which cause division and oppression, are systematically abolished in Bahá'í community life. Today, in the Bahá'í world community, in over 200 nations and territories, women are joining with men in building a global society. Their full contribution toward the establishment of a world civilization is possible. The Bahá'ís of Botswana offers their prayers for the victims and their families of Gender Based Violence, and "charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity... A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love". Bahá'í Holy Scriptures. The Office of Public Affairs of the Bahá'ís of Botswana

# Communities essential to pandemic responses

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community transmission grows in Botswana these partnerships need to grow and continue, including during the socio-economic recovery phase that follows.

COVID-19 has imposed profound challenges on all our countries and communities. HIV responses and people most affected by HIV are no exception, including key and vulnerable populations such as adolescent girls and women in all their diversity, sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people and people who inject drugs.

But even as COVID-19 has disrupted HIV services, the pandemic has underscored the transformative nature of HIV investments and the essential role that communities play in responding to pandemics and building sustainable socio-economic development.

There are many lessons we have learned from the HIV response that can be used in our fight against COVID-19.

And it starts with ensuring we put community responses first when we build back better.

[Dr. Amala Reddy, UNAIDS Botswana Country Director]

# Drastic times call for drastic measures

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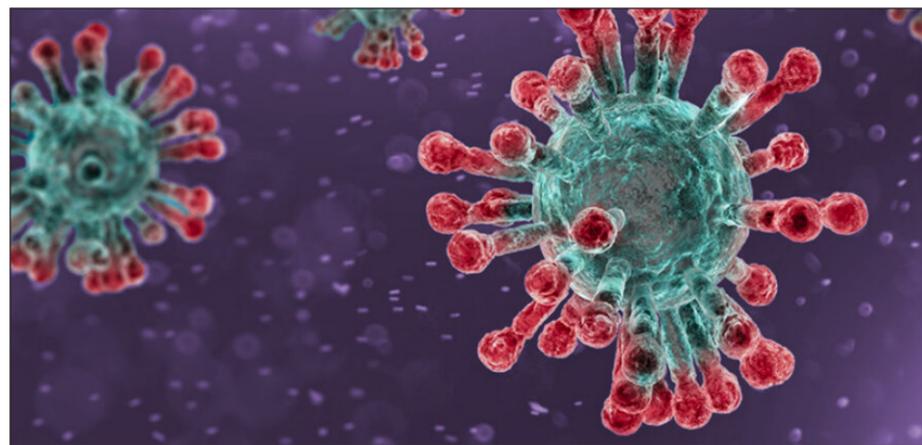
outside fall then the body responds by burning fat to keep body temperature normal. And this is a medical facility!

Temperatures are often taken by one person who may be standing some distance away from the person filling in the register. Now a customer's temperature may be recorded as being too high, for example, 37.8C, and so should not be allowed to enter. But walking to the person sitting at the desk, he may then state that his temperature is normal, say, 36.4C. And he enters the store and so may infect others with COVID-19. Solution – the same person should take the temperature and record it in the register.

The Department of Meteorological Services has told us that we can expect good rains and flooding this summer. Such conditions might result in an increase in malaria cases. Now one symptom of malaria, like COVID-19, is fever. So a person might not be allowed to enter a store with a fever since it will be assumed that he has COVID-19. But he might not have COVID-19; instead, he may be suffering from malaria. Should he be denied entry? Government needs to come up with ways of dealing with such cases; after all, unlike COVID-19, a person with malaria cannot spread it to another person! Perhaps someone with malaria should be required to produce a medical report to confirm that he, indeed, has malaria?

In most cases, the customer fills in the register; if so, then the business employee should sanitise the pen after each customer, but this is not often done. However, it is better for the employee to fill in the information. The register should always have a time in column; most businesses do record this information. However, in some cases I have noticed that the column is present but is not filled in, or it is filled in sometimes.

But most businesses fail to record the time when the customer leaves their premises. This is important and I will give an example to show why. Let us say that I enter a store at 8.40am and this is entered in the time column. Now at 8.50am another person



enters the store; however, a few days later he is found to have COVID-19. Now it will be necessary for contact tracing to be done and to locate those persons with whom he has been in contact. So they will have to contact me since I might have been in the store at the same time as him. But things might be different had the store filled in a time out column. Perhaps I only stayed in the store for five minutes and so left at 8.45 am. The store would have recorded this information in the time out column. The contact tracers would now not need to contact me since the register would show them that I had left the store before the COVID-19 infected person arrived. Clearly much time and effort would be saved if this was done! I have pointed this out to some local businesses but they still could not appreciate why it is important!

But it's the consumption of alcohol where COVID-19 protocols are most often violated. Now it's OK for customers to buy alcohol in a bar or other liquor outlet, but they are required to drink it only at their homes. However, I have seen too often customers drinking in public outside a liquor outlet. In Tonota, at Manyanda complex, there are four liquor outlets including three bars. Here one can see customers drinking outside just as in normal times. At Independence, I counted about 70 vehicles and 100 people there drinking one night – some were sit-

ting at the tables outside the liquor outlets, others were standing around their vehicles whilst others were seated on camp chairs. And of course, they were not wearing masks or practising social distancing. I called the local police and they were there within half an hour and some were fined P1000. But they were still there the next night, and the next... One night at month end in October, I went to the same place. This time, there were almost 150 people drinking away. But both the ordinary police and also the military police had just arrived. When I asked one military policeman what he intended to do, he said that he would simply warn them. But people have been told often that drinking in such places is against the law – they know! I felt that they were generally too soft on the drinkers, but I did notice that some had been fined by the police.

Now this begs the question – what should we do concerning the sale of alcohol during the festive season? At this time, from mid-December to early January there will be three weeks of hard drinking, not just a weekend. Government needs to come up with some ways in dealing with this issue. People's health and lives are at stake! At this time, police patrols need to be more frequent and drinkers who violate the law should, without exception be fined. And maybe the fines could be increased from P1000 to P2000; this

will hit where it matters most – the pocket! In many cases, I have seen people drinking outside a liquor outlet when that business is open. Perhaps that business should be fined for allowing their customers to drink outside their premises, or perhaps their licences should be revoked? And the police should perhaps confiscate their tables around which their customers are drinking. Drastic times call for drastic measures!

Also the sale of alcohol at this time should be prohibited at all liquor outlets – bars, liquor restaurants and shebeens; after all, alcohol is a luxury product and not a necessity for life. The ban could begin a few days before the first payday in December and run until about January 5 2021. Now often lockdowns are announced in the evening just a few hours before midnight at which time they come into force. So the same strategy could be used here – it would reduce numbers of people visiting their nearest liquor outlet for the purpose of hoarding the hard stuff. Now the alcohol lobby here would criticise such a move but drastic times call for drastic measures! They will cite increased unemployment amongst barmaids and the like; however, the health and lives of the nation are at stake here.

Now what should be done if people are defiant and continue to break protocols regarding the drinking of alcohol? Since we are in a State of Emergency, the government can implement measures that it would not normally do. A few months ago, I was watching on TV demonstrations in the streets of Santiago, Chile. Now Chile is nowadays a democracy, but the authorities did not hesitate to deal with the situation using water canon and teargas. So perhaps this could be done here? Drastic times call for drastic measures! Of course, the UDC will criticise the government for 'infringing on the human rights of its citizens.' But who would be to blame here? People, since they are defying the law. Drastic times call for drastic measures!

[Concerned patriot]