THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

23 May 2016

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

In our letter dated 26 March 2016, we described the response of the Bahá'í world to the Tablets of the Divine Plan, in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá urged the friends to travel "toward the East and toward the West and enlighten the people with the light of the Most Great Guidance, so that they may take a portion and share of eternal life." In the decades following the issuance of those weighty Tablets, a stream of believers settled in far-flung corners of the world and planted the banner of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh amidst divers peoples and nations. While devoted pioneers serving in the international arena initially came mainly from North America, Iran and Europe, as the Faith has advanced globally, they now hail from numerous spots across the planet. Indeed, over the course of the last Five Year Plan, some 1,500 friends from over 110 countries ventured into this field. At the same time, capacity has gradually grown in national communities to foster a systematic process of building vibrant communities, and the task of propagating the Faith has come to rest primarily on the shoulders of local inhabitants labouring on the home front, where they have the advantage of familiarity with the language and culture and can settle more readily in nearby clusters as well as remote areas. That nearly 5,000 believers arose to serve as homefront pioneers during the last Plan bears testimony to this greatly increased capacity and is a source of immense joy to us.

Although in recent years an increasing proportion of pioneers are serving on the home front, it is our hope that the friends will continue to consider entering the international arena, whenever their circumstances allow. Opportunity is, of course, open to any believer to arise and settle where he or she can contribute to the progress of the Plan, yet in some countries the need for international pioneers is particularly pressing. In this regard, as anticipated in the last pioneer call, throughout the previous Five Year Plan we drew the attention of selected National Spiritual Assemblies to specific pioneering needs that arose in relation to ten special initiatives that were launched to support the growth and development of the Faith in certain regions with the help of friends from several countries. These devoted servants of Bahá'u'lláh, working alongside the local friends, have helped to strengthen the roots of the Cause in all the countries covered by these initiatives, bringing greater dynamism to the institute process and local community life and, in a number of instances, aiding in the emergence of institutions. Over the coming five years, the International Teaching Centre will continue to identify areas that would benefit from such endeavours with the expectation that, as a result, by the end of the Plan there will be at least one well-advanced intensive programme of growth in every country in the world where external conditions allow for such a development.

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The deployment of homefront pioneers over the next five years will be largely guided by the requirements set out in our message dated 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. As stated in that message, the Five Year Plan just launched aims at raising the number of clusters with an intensive programme of growth to 5,000. A continuing flow of homefront pioneers will contribute significantly to this monumental goal. Whatever assistance they are able to provide to further the work of the Plan is, of course, most welcome; nevertheless, their efforts will have an even greater effect if, guided by the institutions, their capabilities are directed towards specific needs in clusters where the friends are labouring to intensify the growth process. While many friends who wish to serve as homefront pioneers can make commitments that span years, there are those who may only be able to offer shorter periods, sometimes as little as three months. Such friends can kindle a spirit of selfless service and transmit valuable experience from stronger clusters to emerging ones. In time, they return to their communities much inspired and enriched, able to contribute even more effectively to the advancement of their own clusters. We hope that the friends, especially the youth who may have the time and determination to do so during their extended holidays, will take advantage of the opportunity to enter the pioneering field in this way.

It is to the two pioneering imperatives set out above—one primarily in the international field, the other on the home front—that we now call the friends, confident that their response, which with each stage of the Divine Plan grows in both quantity and quality, will be equal to the demands before the community of the Greatest Name. The friends who arise to foster, with tact, love, unity and fortitude, a pattern of community life in clusters across the globe will undoubtedly draw inspiration from the Master's heartfelt cry expressed in the Tablets of the Divine Plan: "O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá' in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it! Please God, ye may achieve it."

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