

The
Ridván Messages
1950 - 2023



THE RIDVÁN MESSAGES

1950–2023

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

1950–1957

Ministry of the Custodians

1957–1963

The Universal House of Justice

1963–Present

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Convention participants walk by Collins Gate as they circumambulate
the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.



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Contents

The Ridván Messages

Part I Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

25 April 1950

25 April 1951

23 April 1952

21 March 1953

April 1954

4 May 1954

April 1955

30 April 1955

April 1956

April 1957

Part II The Ministry of the Custodians

April 1958

April 1959

April 1960

April 1961

Message of the Custodians to the 21 new National Spiritual Assemblies of Latin America; Ridván, 1961

April 1962

April 1963

Part III The Universal House of Justice

April 1963: First Message from the Universal House of Justice

April 1964

April 1965

April 1966

April 1967

May 1968

April 1969

April 1970

April 1971

April 1972

April 1973

April 1974

April 1975

March 1976

March 1977

April 1978

April 1978

March 1979

March 1980

March 1981

April 1982

April 1983

April 1984

April 1985

April 1986

April 1987

April 1988

April 1989

April 1990

April 1991

April 1992

April 1993

April 1994

April 1995

April 1996

April 1996–AFRICA

April 1996–AUSTRALASIA

April 1996–INDIA AND SUB-CONTINENT

April 1996–SOUTH-EAST ASIA

April 1996–EUROPE

April 1996–LATIN AMERICA

April 1996–NORTH AMERICA

April 1996–WESTERN AND CENTRAL ASIA

April 1997

April 1998

April 1999

April 2000

April 2001

April 2002

April 2003

April 2004

April 2005

April 2006

April 2007

April 2008

April 2009

April 2010

April 2011

April 2012

April 2013

April 2014

April 2015

April 2016

April 2017

April 2018

April 2019

April 2020

April 2021

April 2022

April 2023

PART I
SHOGHI EFFENDI, GUARDIAN OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

25 April 1950

Review of World Progress of the Faith

Hail the valiant acts during the course of the last twelve months of members of firmly knit, world embracing, divinely propelled Bahá'í Community, singly, collectively, both sexes, all ages laboring in near, and distant fields, in Eastern and Western hemispheres, gathered from diverse classes, creeds and colors; as administrators, in the respective home lands or as settlers or itinerant teachers overseas; whether serving in private capacity or in official association with authorities.

Second half of opening decade of second Bahá'í century befittingly ushered in.

Recent exploits in virgin territories of Western hemisphere, Arabian Peninsula, South and East Asia raised to one hundred the number of sovereign states, and dependencies, enrolled under the banner of the Faith.

Forthcoming celebrations, commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Herald of the Faith, doubly glorious, through association this historic victory, representing an increase of no less than twenty-two countries in the brief span of six years, since the Centennial of the Declaration of His Mission.

Number of centres in Australasia now exceeds sixty; Canadian Community nearing ninety centres already established; Alaskan territory eleven centres; European goal countries thirty-five, number of newly declared believers almost doubled during course of past year.

Bahá'í literature enriched by translation into Welsh, Eskimo, Swahili, Hausa, Chinyanja, raising the total number of languages to sixty-three.

Languages in process of translation, eleven.

Official recognition, constituting a unique victory in the annals of the Faith in the East, and West, extending to newly formed National Spiritual Assembly of the Dominion of Canada, through granting act of Parliament, enabling the National elected representatives to incorporate as religious organization.

Additional contract placed for the construction of the parapet, crowning the Arcade of the Báb's Mausoleum on Mount Carmel, raising the total tonnage ordered to almost eight hundred.

The erection of the ornamental columns of the Temple interior commenced; ventilation and heating systems installed; number of visitors since the opening of the edifice to the public, over four hundred thousand.

Six year plan of the British Bahá'í Community triumphantly concluded; almost quintupled number of Assemblies in the British Isles; laid basis administrative structure of the Faith in the capital of Eire and in the chief cities of North Ireland and Scotland.

Plan initiated Persian Bahá'í Community consummated 31 Assemblies, 17 Groups, 11 Isolated Centres formed beyond prescribed objectives.

Recognition, long last, accorded by Iráqí authorities to all marriages solemnized by Bahá'í Assemblies in 'Iráq through official registration of the marriage certificate by court, first instance setting a momentous precedent throughout the Muslim East, constituting a

significant landmark in the process of the emancipation of the Oriental followers of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy.

Certificate authorizing the celebration of Bahá'í marriages issued by the District of Columbia court.

Eight islands of Hawaii granted authority to recognize Bahá'í marriages.

Bahá'í marriage contract legalized by attorney general throughout the territory of Alaska.

Bahá'í Holy Days recognized by Educational Department of the State of Victoria, Australia.

Second European Teaching Conference convened in the capital city of Belgium, attended by hundred and thirty representatives from nineteen countries.

The historic first all-Swiss Bahá'í Conference the latest, most promising fruit of the transatlantic enterprise initiated by the American Bahá'í Community, held in the Swiss capital, presaging the acquisition by the goal countries of an independent status within the family of Bahá'í national Communities.

The process of extension of Bahá'í endowments accelerated through the donation of twenty acre property near Anchorage, Alaska; purchase of twenty-two acres in neighborhood of Auckland, site of projected New Zealand summer school; grant of burial ground by Egyptian authorities to Port Said Bahá'í Community.

Ties binding the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations reinforced through participation in European Regional Conference of nongovernmental organizations in Geneva; and in Latin American Conferences in Chile, Uruguay; and in similar

conferences in Kansas and Lake Success; through submission in response to the request of the UNO Committee of statement on the Bahá'í concept and method of community worship, subsequently transmitted to the Secretariat responsible for the planning of permanent headquarters in the United Nations.

Last but not least, nay the crowning achievement of the year just concluded, are the stupendous exertions of the vanguard of the resistlessly advancing Bahá'í World Community resulting in the raising of half a million dollars, virtually attaining the objective set for the two-year drive to ensure the completion of the interior ornamentation of the Mother Temple of the West in anticipation of its approaching jubilee.

First stage of austerity period resolutely embarked upon, successfully traversed.

Resolution no less grim, self abnegation no less heroic, solidarity in sacrifice no less striking, must needs distinguish the final phase of the stern struggle, still facing the dauntless highminded spartan-souled American Bahá'í Community, designed to liquidate the deficit in the General Fund, marring the otherwise spotless record of collective achievement, as well as to provide financial support imperatively required to meet, through prompt despatch of substantial number of competent pioneers, the emergency existing in Central and South America, thereby ensuring the glorious consummation of the thirteen-year-old enterprise through the formation of the projected twin National Assemblies in Latin America.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, April 25, 1950]

25 April 1951

Epoch-Making Events

My heart is filled with thankfulness at contemplation of the chain of swiftly succeeding, epoch-making events transpiring in the course of the fifth year of the second Seven Year Plan, rendered memorable through association with the Centenary of the Martyrdom of the Prophet-Herald of the Bahá'í Dispensation testifying to God's unfailing protection and the manifold blessings vouchsafed to the Community of the Most Great Name alike in its World Centre and in all continents of the globe.

Divine retributive justice is strikingly demonstrated through a series of sudden, rapid, devastating blows sweeping over leaders and henchmen of breakers of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant foiling the schemes, levelling the hopes, and well-nigh extinguishing the remnants of the conspiring crew which dared challenge the authority, succeeded in inflicting untold sorrow and assiduously plotted to disrupt the Will and Testament of its appointed Centre.

The triumphant, resistlessly expanding Bahá'í Administrative Order now embraces one hundred and six sovereign states and dependencies constituting an addition of no less than twenty-seven countries since the Centenary celebration of the Declaration of the Mission of the Holy Báb.

The number of languages into which Bahá'í literature is translated or in process of translation is over eighty.

The number of incorporated Assemblies, local and national, is one hundred and ten.

The Centenary of the Martyrdom of the Herald of the Faith was befittingly commemorated, synchronizing with the completion of the Arcade and Parapet of His Sepulcher on Mount Carmel, marking the termination of the two-year, quarter million dollar enterprise.

The preliminaries for the erection of two additional Pillars of the Universal House of Justice, culminating in the formation of National Assemblies in Central America, Mexico, and the Antilles, and in South America have been successfully concluded, following the raising of a similar Pillar in the Dominion of Canada.

The interior ornamentation of the Mother Temple of the West is virtually completed, paving the way for the provision of accessories and landscaping in preparation of its public dedication destined to coincide with the twin celebrations of the consummation of the fifty year old enterprise and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic mission.

The prelude to the historic African campaign, the foremost objective of the two year plan of the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles, linking in formal association four National Assemblies is marked by the departure of the first pioneer to Tanganyika and plans for settlement Gold Coast and Uganda.

Contracts amounting to over two hundred ten thousand dollars successively placed for stones, window frames, railing, steel, cement, required for the erection of the Octagon, Cylinder and Dome of the Báb's Sepulcher raising to sixteen hundred tons total tonnage ordered from Italy.

A quarter-century old project is terminated through the construction of the last two terraces connecting the same edifice with the Templar Colony at the foot of Carmel.

The four year plan initiated by the Persian National Assembly in the promotion of the interests of the women members of the community is successfully concluded despite increasing disabilities resulting

from the recrudescence of religious fanaticism afflicting the sore-pressed homeland of Bahá'u'lláh.

A notable step in the progress of Bahá'í women of the Middle East is taken through the extension of the right of membership in local Assemblies to women believers in Egypt.

The third European Teaching Conference and Summer School was held in Copenhagen and attended by one hundred seventy-seven persons representing twenty-two countries.

The second All-Swiss Conference convened in Zurich, foreshadowing the closer integration of the ten goal countries of the European continent through the eventual formation of regional National Assemblies in Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, Switzerland, Italian and Iberian peninsulas.

Bahá'í literature in Greenlandic, previously disseminated as far as Thule, Etah, beyond the Arctic Circle, has been dispatched to radio station in Brondlundsford, Peary Land, eighty-second latitude, northernmost outpost of the globe.

Ties, linking the World Centre of the Faith with the newly-emerged, rapidly consolidating sovereign state in the Holy Land, have been reinforced through the delivery by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Mazra'ih Mansion into Bahá'í custody, the recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days by the Ministry of Education and Culture, following exemption granted to Bahá'í international endowments, and recognition accorded Bahá'í marriage certificate.

Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Akká, the scene of severe crises in the course of the ministries of the Founder of the Faith and the Centre of His Covenant renovated and furnished, are added to the Holy Places already opened to the steadily swelling number of visitors both local and foreign.

A significant step was taken by the City Governorate of Cairo presaging the eventual recognition by state authorities of the Bahá'í laws of personal status, already codified and submitted to the central government by the Egyptian National Assembly.

Bonds binding the Bahá'í world community to United Nations strengthened by Bahá'í participation in regional conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Geneva and Istanbul.

Preliminary steps taken in preparation of final design for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár on Mount Carmel by President of the International Bahá'í Council, specifically appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to be its architect.

Process of the unfoldment of the ever-advancing Administrative Order accelerated by the formation of the International Bahá'í Council designed to assist in the erection of the superstructure of the Báb's Sepulcher, cement ties uniting the budding World Administrative Centre with the recently established state, and pave the way for the formation of the Bahá'í Court, essential prelude to the institution of the Universal House of Justice.

I hail particularly the brilliant victory won by the American Bahá'í Community in meeting the financial requirements for the completion of the interior ornamentation of the Temple and eliminating the deficit in the Victory Fund, exploits doubly meritorious owing to the added responsibilities courageously assumed to assist enterprise in the African field, and construction of the Báb's Sepulcher in the Holy Land.

I am thrilled by the multiple evidences of the simultaneous prosecution of Bahá'í national plans, East and West, and the rise and steady consolidation of the World Centre of the Faith, constituting the distinguishing features of the second epoch of the Formative Age whose inception on the morrow of the Second World War coincided with the inauguration of the second Bahá'í century, and which bids fair to eclipse the splendors of the preceding epoch, which posterity

will associate with the birth and rise of the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, April 25, 1951]

23 April 1952

Irresistible March of the Faith

Soul stirred, heart uplifted by recollection of events signaling the twelve month period preceding the fateful year destined to witness the consummation of series of plans formulated by Bahá'í National Assemblies of five continents, as well as the inauguration of the second, glorious Jubilee of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The irresistible march of the Faith marked simultaneously by the steady consolidation of its administrative institutions and the rapid enlargement of its limits. No less than eighteen countries have been enrolled, raising the total number within its orbit to one hundred twenty-four. Languages in which Bahá'í literature is printed or is being translated are now ninety, including twelve African languages. The vast process of the rise and establishment of the World Centre of the Faith has been accelerated. Contingents of Hands of the Cause have been successively appointed in every continent of the globe, five of whom are shouldering responsibilities in the Holy Land. The International Bahá'í Council has been enlarged and officers designated.

An interview was accorded by, and literature presented to the Israel Prime Minister in the course of his American visit by representatives of the American National Assembly. Eighteen plots, a twenty-two thousand square meter area, have been added to the International Bahá'í endowments on the slopes of Carmel. Government survey concluded paving the way for the acquisition of over one hundred forty thousand square meters of property in the precincts of the Most Holy Tomb at Bahjí. The design for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár on Carmel, conceived by the President of the International Bahá'í Council, completed. Privileges, exemption already accorded Bahá'í Holy Places in Israel by Ministry of Finance extended to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Home, Eastern and Western Pilgrim Houses. Pilgrimages to World Centre of the Faith resumed following decade of external

hostilities and internal disturbances agitating the Holy Land. Eight piers, designed to support the thousand ton superstructure of the Báb's Sepulcher constructed. Successive contracts, totalling approximately forty-seven thousand dollars, for the construction of the structural work and the erection of the Octagon signed, culminating in the completion of the first unit of the superstructure, and the raising of eight pinnacles, constituting the second crown of the Holy Edifice. Preparations to build the Drum, the foundation unit of the golden Dome of the Sepulcher, commenced.

Twin pillars of the future House of Justice erected in Central and South America, additional pillar projected for Europe uniting the heart and south of the continent.

Preliminary measures initiated for the convocation of four intercontinental conferences in the African, American, European and Asiatic continents, involving the participation of twelve National Spiritual Assemblies, designed alike to befittingly celebrate the Centenary of the Year Nine and to launch ten year crusade destined to culminate in the Most Great Jubilee.

Two year plan of the Bahá'í community of the British Isles formally launched on the African continent through the dispatch of pioneers to the virgin territories of Tanganyika, Uganda, and the Gold Coast, has been reinforced by the assignment of Liberia to the American, Somaliland, Nyasaland and North Rhodesia to the Persian, Zanzibar and Madagascar to the Indian, and Libya and Algeria to the Egyptian, National Assemblies, raising the number of States and Dependencies already soon to be opened to the Faith to twenty-five.

First fruits garnered comprise purchase of seventeen thousand dollar Hazíratu'l-Quds in Kampala, settlement of Persian, American, British, Egyptian and Portuguese pioneers in Liberia, North Rhodesia, Angola, Libya, Spanish Morocco and Mozambique, inauguration of teaching classes, public meetings and firesides, enrollment of several native Africans belonging to the Teso, Yao,

Buganda and Mutoco tribes, and the formation of Spiritual Assemblies in Kampala and Dar-es-Salaam.

European Teaching campaign, exceeding fondest hopes, stimulated successively by convocation of the fourth European Teaching Conference in Scheveningen, representative of twenty-one countries, the first Iberian Conference in Madrid, the third Swiss Conference in Bern, the first Italian Conference in Rome, the first Benelux Conference in Brussels and the establishment of headquarters in Amsterdam, Brussels, Luxembourg-Ville, Bern and Lisbon.

The process of consolidation of the Faith stimulated by the recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days by the Superintendent of Public Schools in Kenosha, Superintendent School in Milwaukee, and Rhode Island State Department of Civil Service, and of the Bahá'í marriage certificate by civil authorities of Indianapolis; by the authorization by Adjutant General of Bahá'í identification for believers serving in U.S. Armed Forces.

Bahá'í administrative centres steadily multiplying in Hijáz, Yemen, Bahrain, Ahsá, Kuwait, Qatar, Dubai, Masqat, Aden, heralding convocation of historic Bahá'í Convention in the Arabian Peninsula, destined to culminate in the erection of a pillar of the Universal House of Justice in the midmost heart of the Islamic world.

The nineteen month plan, formulated by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Indian subcontinent and Burma, aiming among other things at the introduction and consolidation of the Faith in the capital cities of Nepal, Siam, Indo-China, Malaya, Indonesia and Sarawak.

Ties binding International Bahá'í Community to United Nations reinforced by official participation of Bahá'í delegates in regional Non-Governmental Conferences in Istanbul, Managua, Denpasar, Paris and Lawrence, Kansas. Historic site of House occupied by Bahá'u'lláh in Istanbul has been partly purchased, and investigations conducted for the acquisition of similar sites associated with the exile of the Founder of the Faith in Adrianople.

Northern outposts of the Faith reinforced by the settlement of pioneers in Edgedes Minde, Greenland, and in Yellowknife, Canadian North Western Territories.

Last but not least, the internal ornamentation of the Mother Temple of the West has been terminated, and design adopted, funds allocated by the Temple Trustees for the landscaping of its immediate surroundings, constituting the final step for its approaching Jubilee. Appeal American Bahá'í community standing on threshold of concluding year of second Seven Year Plan, traversing the last stage of the austerity period, confronted by the approaching centenary of the darkest, bloodiest episode in Bahá'í history, associated with the nation-wide holocaust of Táhirih's martyrdom, and with Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál in Tíhrán, to arise and scale still loftier heights of self-sacrifice and efface the deficit in the National Fund. Address in particular fervent plea to brace itself to play a preponderating role in the impending world crusade, which a world community, utilizing the agencies of a divinely-appointed world administrative order, is preparing to launch, amidst the deepening shadows of a world crisis for the execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's world-encircling plan and the subsequent unfoldment of a world civilization, and the ultimate attainment of the supreme objective, the illumination and redemption of a whole world.

Advise share message National Assemblies East and West.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, April 23, 1952]

21 March 1953

Twofold Victory in Holy Land

On occasion of Naw-Rúz of Holy Year convey twin joyful tidings to National Assemblies of the Bahá'í world. Building operations of the final unit of the Báb's Sepulcher commenced. Recall at this hour successive landmarks, each coinciding with a Naw-Rúz Festival in the history of the sixty year old enterprise founded by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation. First, Naw-Rúz, 1909, witnessed the entombment within the Holy of Holies of the Shrine constructed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of the dust of the Martyr-Prophet of the Faith. Second, Naw-Rúz, 1949, coincided with the laying of the first threshold stones of the arcade. Third, Naw-Rúz, 1951, synchronized with the termination of the excavation within the Shrine foundations for the eight piers designed to support the weight of the three story superstructure. Fourth, Naw-Rúz, 1952, is associated with the completion of the octagon setting second crown of the holy Edifice.

The celebrations of Naw-Rúz in this Holy Year are heightened by the placing of the first stones encircling the base of the dome. Anticipating, as the climax of the world-wide rejoicings of the Holy Year draw near, the placing of the gilded tiles, the fourth and last unit of the majestic Edifice. Fervently hoping that the greatest enterprise undertaken at the World Centre of the Faith will be consummated ere the conclusion of the festivities of the Holy Year.

International endowments surrounding the tomb of the Prophet-Herald of the Faith on the bosom of God's Holy Mountain are considerably extended through the acquisition, after thirty years' effort, of a wooded area of over twenty-three thousand square meters, including a building overlooking the sacred spot, made possible through the estate bequeathed to the Faith by the herald of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, Roy Wilhelm, raising the total area within

the precincts permanently dedicated to the Báb's Sepulcher to almost a quarter million square meters.

Heart filled with humble gratitude at the double victory of the Faith, adding great joyousness to the Bahá'í New Year's Day, presaging still greater triumphs as the Bahá'í World approaches the high water mark of the world-wide celebrations of the memorable year commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, March 21, 1953]

April 1954

A Divinely-Guided Faith

On the eve of this Ridván Festival marking the opening of the second decade of the second Bahá'í century, and coinciding with the termination of the first year of the World Spiritual Crusade, I hail with feelings of joy and wonder the superb feats of the heroic company of the Knights of the Lord of Hosts in pursuance of their sublime mission for the spiritual conquest of the planet. The first twelve months of this decade-long enterprise unexampled in its scope, significance and potentialities in the world's spiritual history and launched simultaneously, amidst the climax of the world-wide festivities of a memorable Holy Year, in the American, the European, the African, the Asiatic and the Australian continents, have witnessed the hoisting of the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in no less than a hundred virgin territories of the globe. The total number of the newly opened sovereign states and dependencies comprising Principalities, Sultanates, Emirates, Sheikdoms, Protectorates, Trust Territories and Crown Colonies, scattered over the face of the earth, represents almost seven-eighths of all the territories, exclusive of the Soviet Republics and Satellites, destined to be opened in the course of an entire decade. The northern frontiers of a divinely guided, rapidly marching, majestically expanding Faith have been pushed, in consequence of the phenomenal success recently achieved by the vanguard of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders, beyond the Arctic Circle as far as Arctic Bay, Franklin, 73 degrees latitude. Its southern limits have now reached the Falkland Islands in the neighborhood of Magallanes, the world's southernmost city. Other outlying outposts have been established in places as far apart as Sikkim at the foot of the Himalayas, the Lofoten Islands in the heart of the European Northland, Fezzan on the northern fringe of the Sahara Desert, the Andaman Islands and the Seychelles, the penal colonies in the Indian Ocean, the three Guianas and the leper colonies on the Atlantic Coast, the Faroe and Shetland Islands, the wind-swept and inhospitable archipelagos of the North Sea, Hadhramaut on the sun-baked shores

of the Arabian Peninsula, St. Helena isolated in the midst of the South Atlantic Ocean and the Gilbert Islands, the war-devastated, sparsely populated Atolls situated in the heart of the Pacific Ocean.

God's infant Faith, confined during the first nine years of its existence to its birthland and the adjoining territory of 'Irâq, reaching, in the course of the thirty-nine years of Bahá'u'lláh's Ministry, to thirteen other lands, enlarged, during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's twenty-nine year Ministry, through the opening of twenty additional countries, only succeeded, after the lapse of three-quarters of a century, in including within its orbit thirty-five countries within both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

The subsequent quarter of a century, constituting the first Epoch of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, witnessed the planting of the banner of the Faith in over forty territories of the globe, raising the number of countries included within its pale, on the eve of the Centenary Celebrations of the Declaration of the Báb's Mission to seventy-eight. The nine-year interval separating the first from the second Bahá'í Jubilee was signalized by the spiritual conquest of no less than fifty countries of the globe, whilst the first year of the Ten Year Plan has been immortalized by the opening of one hundred countries, swelling the number of the sovereign states and dependencies enlisted under the standard of the Cause of God to two hundred and twenty-eight. All territories in North, Central and South America; all sovereign states and principalities on the continent of Europe, excluding the Russian Republics and Satellites; all territories on the Asiatic continent, with the exception of Tibet, of Bhutan and of the Soviet Republics; all the islands of the Mediterranean; all the islands of the North Sea, with the exception of Spitzbergen; all African territories with the exception of Spanish Guinea; all the islands of the North and South Atlantic Ocean except Anticosti and St. Thomas; all the islands of the Pacific Ocean except Comoro Islands, Cocos Island, Nicobar Islands, Hainan Island, Portuguese Timor, Chagos Archipelago, Loyalty Islands, Marshall Islands, Admiralty Islands, Mariana Islands, are now included within the orbit of an irresistibly unfolding, rapidly consolidating, world-girdling Administrative Order.

The number of the European, the African, the Asiatic, and the American-Indian languages, including seven supplementary languages, into which Bahá'í literature has been, and is being translated, is over forty-two, raising the total number of the translations undertaken since the inception of the Faith to one hundred and thirty.

The African Campaign, outshining the brilliant success of the enterprise launched in Latin America, throwing into shade the splendor of the victories won in recent years on the European continent, eclipsing all previous collective pioneer undertakings embarked upon in the Asiatic and Australian continents, has almost doubled, in the course of a single year, the number of territories opened since the introduction of the Faith in that continent over eighty years ago. The total number of converts to the Faith belonging to the African race has passed the six hundred mark. The total number of African Bahá'í centres has now been raised to over one hundred and ninety. The total number of the tribes indigenous to the soil of that continent represented in the Faith is now over sixty.

A single territory out of the forty-five territories already opened to the Faith in the African continent, situated in its very heart and which, a little over two years ago did not possess a single Bahá'í, now boasts of over five hundred colored converts, who are settled in over eighty localities, are drawn from thirty tribes, are provided with thirteen local Assemblies, and anticipate the immediate formation of about ten additional Assemblies. This same territory has, moreover, distinguished itself throughout the entire Bahá'í world through the dispatch of nine members of its mother Assembly for the purpose of pioneering in neighboring centres, as well as in territories situated on the eastern and western coasts of the African continent. A number of the newly-won recruits in some of these territories have, moreover, been instrumental in winning the allegiance of some of the members of their race, and have, in their turn, succeeded in opening no less than three neighboring territories in that continent.

Contact has been established with no less than twenty-two American Indian tribes, raising the total number of tribes contacted throughout

the Western Hemisphere to thirty-four. The first Greenlandic, the first Pygmy, the first Berber, the first Fijian Bahá'ís have been enrolled, swelling the number of races represented in the Bahá'í World Community to thirty-five.

The opening year of this World Spiritual Crusade has, moreover, gathered significance through the convocation first of the Stockholm, and later of the New Delhi Intercontinental Teaching Conferences, which, together with the two previous Conferences held during the first part of the Holy Year in Kampala and Wilmette, assembled a total of over thirty-four hundred followers of the Faith from more than eighty countries of both the Eastern and the Western Hemispheres and representing the principal races of mankind.

Within the confines of the Holy Land, “the Heart of the world and the Qiblih of all nations,” the erection of the first base stones of the ornamental crown of the Dome of the Báb’s Sepulcher which had commenced with Naw-Rúz of the Holy Year, was followed successively by the laying, during the Ridván period, of the first of the twelve thousand gilded tiles destined to cover the two-hundred and fifty square meter area of the Dome and the placing of the stone lantern which marked the consummation of the three quarters of a million dollar enterprise, and coincided with the closing period of the Year associated with the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Mission of Bahá’u’lláh. The site for the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of the Holy Land has been selected—an area of approximately twenty thousand square meters—situated at the head of the Mountain of God, in close proximity to the Spot hallowed by the footsteps of Bahá’u’lláh, near the time-honored Cave of Elijah, and associated with the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel, the Charter of the World Spiritual and Administrative Centres of the Faith on that mountain. Funds totaling one hundred thousand dollars have, moreover, been contributed by one of the Hands of the Cause, residing in the Holy Land, and negotiations have been initiated with the Israeli authorities for the purpose of effecting the immediate purchase of the selected site. Measures have been undertaken and Bahá’í Continental Funds inaugurated in anticipation of the forthcoming appointment by the fifteen Hands residing outside the Holy Land of five Auxiliary Boards, one in each of the continents of the globe, the members of

which will act as deputies of the Hands in their respective continents, and will aid and advise them in the effective prosecution of the Ten-Year Plan, and will assist them, at a later period, in the discharge of their dual and sacred task of safeguarding the Faith and of promoting its teaching activities. The international Bahá'í endowments, situated in the heart of Mt. Carmel, and in the plain of Akká, already extending over an area of over three hundred and fifty thousand square meters, have been enlarged through the acquisition of properties overlooking the Resting Places of the Most Exalted Leaf and of the Purest Branch, which, when added to the plots situated on the ridge of Mt. Carmel, on its western extremity and in the close neighborhood of the Shrine built within its heart—for the acquisition of which negotiations have been set afoot—will constitute an addition of over thirty thousand square meters to the vast area of Bahá'í holdings permanently dedicated to the Shrines of the Founder of the Faith and of its Herald. The embellishment of the Haram-i-Aqdas, the outer Sanctuary of Bahá'u'lláh's Sepulcher, already accomplished in the course of the Holy Year commemorating the centenary of the birth of His prophetic Mission, has been greatly enhanced through the laying out, on both its northern and southern sides, of formal gardens, extending over an area of ten thousand square meters, providing a befitting approach to His Mansion and considerably widening the area stretching in front of His holy Sepulcher. The design of the international Bahá'í Archives, the first stately Edifice destined to usher in the establishment of the World Administrative Centre of the Faith on Mt. Carmel—the Ark referred to by Bahá'u'lláh in the closing passages of His Tablet of Carmel—has been completed, and plans and drawings forwarded to Italy for the purpose of securing bids for its construction immediately after the conclusion of the necessary preliminary steps taken in the Holy Land for its forthcoming erection. Israel Branches of the British, the Persian, the Canadian and the Australian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies have been legally established, recognized formally as Religious Societies by the Israeli Civil Authorities, and empowered to hold without restriction title to immovable property in any part of the country on behalf of their parent Assemblies. Contact has moreover been established with the President of Israel, its Prime Minister and five other Cabinet Ministers, as well as with the President of the Knesset, culminating in the establishment of a special Bahá'í Department in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and in an official statement by the Head of this

Ministry to Parliament emphasizing the international scope of the Faith and the importance of its World Centre—a series of events that have paved the way for the forthcoming official visit, during the early days of the Ridván period, of the President of Israel, himself, to the Báb's Sepulcher on Mt. Carmel.

The site of the Síyáh-Chál—that pestilential subterranean Pit, the scene of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic Mission, and the holiest place in the capital city of His native land—has been recently purchased, together with the surrounding area, involving an expenditure of approximately four hundred thousand dollars contributed by a Persian follower of the Faith, whilst negotiations have been initiated for the acquisition of the site of the Báb's incarceration in the mountains of Ádhirbayján. Full rights have been accorded to Bahá'í women residing in the cradle of the Faith, to participate in the membership of both national and local Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies, removing thereby the last remaining obstacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá'í Community.

Eleven Temple Funds have been inaugurated, amounting to almost a quarter of a million dollars, for the purchase of land for future Bahá'í Temples in the Western Hemisphere, in the European, the African, the Asiatic and the Australian continents, followed by the purchase of a four-acre plot, commanding an extensive view of the Pacific Ocean and the greater portion of Greater Sydney area, and by the selection of appropriate sites outside the Cities of Frankfurt and of Panama City.

The institutions of Bahá'í National Hazíratu'l-Quds in East and West, already reaching an estimated value of over a million and a half dollars, have been enhanced through the purchase and formal opening of the Hazíratu'l-Quds of the Bahá'ís of Paris, destined to evolve into the national administrative headquarters of the French Bahá'í Community, and through the inauguration of National Hazíratu'l-Quds Funds in Anchorage, Alaska, as well as in the capital cities of Italy and of Switzerland.

The initial landscaping of the area surrounding the Mother Temple of the West, involving an expenditure of over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, has been completed and been followed by an appropriation of two hundred and twenty thousand dollars by the United States National Spiritual Assembly for the completion of the entire project. The nature of the first Dependency of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Wilmette has been finally decided upon by the members of that same Assembly, in anticipation of its early establishment within the precincts of the Mother Temple of the West. The Local Spiritual Assemblies of San Diego, Sacramento and Fresno in California, of Tucson in Arizona, and of Oak Park in Illinois have been legally incorporated, raising the number of national and local Bahá'í incorporated Assemblies in the United States of America and in the entire Bahá'í world to sixty-three and one hundred and twenty, respectively. National Bahá'í endowments have been established in Anchorage, Alaska. The Bahá'í Assemblies of Tucson, Arizona and of Sacramento, California have been qualified to conduct legal Bahá'í marriage services. Bahá'í Holy Days have been recognized in Los Angeles, California and Castro Valley, California; Niles Township, Michigan; Seattle, Washington; Newton, Massachusetts; Prince George County, Maryland; Cleveland, Ohio; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Maywood, Illinois.

The spiritual conquest of one hundred territories of the globe, the steady rise of the embryonic World Order of the Faith, and the multiplication and consolidation of its institutions have, in the course of the opening year of this World Spiritual Crusade, been paralleled by a no less startling decline in the fortunes of the enemies of the Faith, as evidenced by the removal, by the Hand of Providence, of its arch-enemy in Persia who, for thirty years, savagely attacked its Founders and its chief Promoter, and tirelessly schemed to extinguish its light, dishonor its name and wreck its institutions, as well as by the death of two others, who, in varying degrees, demonstrated their ingratitude and infidelity to the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

The opening phase of this gigantic, divinely propelled, world-encircling Crusade has been triumphantly concluded. The success crowning the initial stage in its unfoldment has exceeded our fondest expectations. The most vital and spectacular objective of the Ten Year

Plan has been virtually attained ere the termination of the first year of this decade-long stupendous enterprise. The second phase, now auspiciously ushered in, must witness, in all the territories of the planet, whether newly opened or not, an upsurge of activity which, in its range and intensity, will excel the exploits which have so greatly enlarged the limits, and noised abroad the fame, of the Cause of God.

The energetic and systematic prosecution of the all important teaching work both at home and abroad, designed to increase rapidly the number of the avowed and active supporters of the Faith; the preservation, at any cost, of the prizes so laboriously won in the far flung, the numerous and newly opened territories of the globe; the maintenance, by every available means, of the status of local Spiritual Assemblies already established throughout the Bahá'í world; the steady multiplication of isolated centres, of groups and of local Assemblies in order to hasten the emergence of no less than forty-eight National Spiritual Assemblies in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres; the prompt conclusion of negotiations for the purchase of sites for future Bahá'í Temples in the American, the European, the Asiatic and the African continents; the initiation of Funds for the establishment of National Hazíratu'l-Quds in the capital cities of the Sovereign States and in the chief cities of the Dependencies specifically mentioned in the Plan; the speedy fulfillment of the task undertaken for the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature in the languages allocated under that same Plan, to various National Spiritual Assemblies; the continued acquisition of Bahá'í Holy Places in Bahá'u'lláh's native land; the adoption of preparatory measures for the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs of Tíhrán and of Frankfurt; the establishment of the first Dependency of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Wilmette; the inauguration of National Bahá'í endowments designed to pave the way for the formation of National Spiritual Assemblies; the lending of a fresh impetus to the incorporation of local Spiritual Assemblies; the establishment of Bahá'í Publishing Trusts—these stand out as the essential objectives of the phase now unfolding before the eyes of the Bahá'í communities in the five continents of the globe.

I direct my fervent plea to all the delegates assembled at the twelve annual Bahá'í Conventions to ponder these objectives in their hearts,

to dedicate themselves anew to the tasks now challenging the spirit and combined resources of the entire body of the followers of the Faith, to rouse all the communities they represent to assume a worthy share in the common and gigantic effort that must needs be exerted for the attainment of the aforementioned goals, ensuring thereby the uninterrupted progress and the ultimate consummation of the noblest collective enterprise undertaken by the followers of the Most Great Name for the propagation and the establishment of His Faith over the entire face of the planet.

—Shoghi

[April, 1954]

4 May 1954

Glad Tidings

On the morrow of the close of the Ridván period share with National Assemblies of the Bahá'í world additional glad tidings supplementing the message addressed a fortnight ago to delegates to national Conventions East and West.

Six acre and five acre plots have been purchased in Kampala and Panama City as sites of future Temples in the heart of the African continent and Central America.

First historic African Spiritual Assemblies have been formed in Johannesburg, Brazzaville, Victoria, Topremang, Casablanca, Tangier, Algiers, Tripoli, Bukora. In Uganda alone, eleven additional Assemblies have been established, over three hundred and eighty additional converts enrolled, raising the total white and Negro believers to over six hundred and seventy. The number of localities where Bahá'ís reside on the Arabian Peninsula is now over fifteen, in Egypt and Sudan over forty, in the British Isles over fifty, in Australasia over sixty, in the ten European goal countries over seventy, in Germany and Austria over seventy, in Uganda over eighty, in Canada over a hundred, in Latin America over a hundred and ten, in the Indian subcontinent and Burma over a hundred and thirty, in the African continent over a hundred and ninety, in Persia over six hundred and in the United States over twelve hundred, swelling the number of Bahá'í centres scattered over the surface of the globe to well nigh twenty-nine hundred.

Additional National Hazíratu'l-Quds Funds have been inaugurated in ten countries of Central America.

The number of Bahá'í books and pamphlets for the blind transcribed into Braille, English, Esperanto, German, Japanese, now totals over a hundred and ten.

The President of the State of Israel, accompanied by Mrs. Ben Zvi, visited, as anticipated, the Shrines on Mount Carmel, following a reception in their honor held in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house marking the first official visit paid by the Head of a sovereign independent State to the Sepulchers of the Martyr-Prophet of the Faith and the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

The following pioneers have been inscribed on the Roll of Honor since the fifth periodic announcement: Bruce Matthews, Howard Gilliland, Labrador; Olivia Kelsey and Florence Ullrich, Monaco; Joan Powis, South Rhodesia; Sohrab Payman, San Marino; Samuel Njiki, Mehrangiz Munsiff, French Cameroons; Gail Avery, Baranof Island; Benedict Eballa, Ashanti Protectorate; Martin Manga, Northern Territories Protectorate; Gayle Woolson, Galapagòs Islands; Bula Stewart and John Allen and wife, Swaziland; Charles Duncan, Harry Clark, John Fozdar, Brunei; David Tanyi, French Togoland; Edward Tabe, Albert Buapiah, British Togoland; Kay Zinky, Magdalen Islands; John and Margery Kellberg, Dutch West Indies; Robert Powers, Jr., and Cynthia Olson, Mariana Islands; Habib Esfahani, French West Africa.

The Roll of Honor, after the lapse of one year since the launching of the World Crusade, is now closed, with the exception of pioneers who have already left for their destination, as well as those first arriving in the few remaining virgin territories inside and outside Soviet Republics and satellites.

The Concourse on High will continue to applaud the highly meritorious services rendered by future volunteers arising to reinforce the historic work so nobly initiated by the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in the far-flung, newly opened territories. Posterity will likewise record with admiration and gratitude the initial victories destined to be won

in the course of the spiritual conquest of the continents and islands of the globe.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, May 4, 1954]

April 1955

Achievements of Second Year of Ten Year Plan

On the occasion of the triumphant conclusion of the second year of the Ten Year Plan, marking the termination of the first half of the second phase of a decade-long Bahá'í World Spiritual Crusade, I invite the delegates assembled at the twelve Annual Conventions, convened simultaneously throughout the Bahá'í world during the Ridván Festival, to survey with me the multiple evidences of the progressive unfoldment of the incalculable potentialities with which this world-enveloping, steadily consolidating enterprise has been endowed by the Author of the Tablets of the Divine Plan at the very hour of its inception.

In every continent of the globe, throughout the widely scattered islands of the Mediterranean and the North Sea, of the Atlantic, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, this mighty Plan, devised for the systematic execution of the Design conceived by the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant for the propagation of His Father's Faith, is forging ahead, gaining momentum with every passing day, tearing down barriers in all climes and amidst divers peoples and races, widening irresistibly the scope of its beneficent operations, and revealing ever more compelling signs of its inherent strength as it marches towards the spiritual conquest of the entire planet.

TWO HUNDRED THIRTY-SIX TERRITORIES NOW OPENED TO THE FAITH

The number of the virgin territories of the globe opened to the Faith has, since the inauguration, and in direct consequence of the vigorous prosecution, of this stupendous undertaking, been raised to one hundred and eight, swelling the number of the sovereign states and chief dependencies included within the pale of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to two hundred and thirty-six, above two hundred of

which have been enlisted under His banner since the ascension of the Centre of His Covenant.

All the territories within the confines of the American, the European, the Asiatic and the African continents, assigned to ten Bahá'í National Assemblies, have, with the exception of Soviet-controlled territories, been opened. Of the seventy-two islands allocated to eleven Bahá'í National Assemblies no less than sixty-four have opened their doors to the vanguard of Bahá'í Crusaders, leaving Spitzbergen and Anticosti Island, situated respectively in the North Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, Nicobar Islands, Cocos Island and Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean, and Loyalty Islands, Sakhalin Island and Hainan Island in the Pacific Ocean—one of which is a native reserve, two of which are within the Soviet orbit, while four others are either privately owned or controlled by private companies—as yet unopened by the heroic band battling for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The northern limits of the Faith in Europe have been pushed beyond the Arctic Circle as far as 70 degrees latitude, through the settlement of a Bahá'í pioneer in Reals Kolen, Batsfjord, Finnmark, only three degrees below Arctic Bay, Franklin, the northernmost Bahá'í Centre established, in the course of the opening year of the Ten-Year Plan, in the North American Continent. Valiant pioneers have, moreover, volunteered and are busily engaged in devising plans, or have actually embarked on the necessary preparations, to cross the mountain frontiers of Tibet, to enter the Ukraine, beyond the Iron Curtain, to gain admission to the few remaining, hitherto inaccessible islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and to penetrate deep into the Arctic Ocean as far as the icebound island of Spitzbergen.

NUMBER OF RACES, LANGUAGES, INCORPORATED ASSEMBLIES AUGMENTED

No less than forty races are now represented in the world-wide Bahá'í Community, which has been recently enriched through the enrollment of representatives of the Greek, the Berber, the Pigmy, the Somali and Guanche races. The number of localities where Bahá'ís now reside is well over thirty-two hundred, of which fourteen hundred are located

in the Great Republic of the West, over six hundred in the Cradle of the Faith, more than three hundred in the African Continent, and over one hundred each in the Dominion of Canada, in Australasia, Latin America and in the Indian Sub-Continent. In the African Continent alone the number of members of the Negro race has, within the space of four years, increased to over thirteen hundred; the number of territories opened to the Faith has reached fifty-eight, the number of local Spiritual Assemblies already established and functioning is now fifty, the number of tribes represented within the swiftly expanding Bahá'í Community is now over ninety, whilst the number of African languages into which Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated exceeds fifty.

The total number of the European, the African, the Asiatic and American-Indian languages into which Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated is one hundred and sixty-seven, of which fifty-five are among those included in the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan, and twenty-four are supplementary languages into which the translation of Bahá'í literature has been spontaneously undertaken by the indefatigable band of pioneers and new converts in Africa, in South East Asia, in the South Pacific Islands and in the Antipodes.

The number of incorporated Bahá'í national and local Spiritual Assemblies has now reached one hundred and forty, seventy-five of which are located in the United States of America, the latest additions to this steadily mounting list in other continents being the Assemblies of London and Manchester in the British Isles; of Ciudad Trujillo in the Dominican Republic; of Kuching in Sarawak; of Jakarta in Indonesia; of Helsinki in Finland and of San Juan in Puerto Rico.

ACTIVITIES AT THE WORLD CENTRE

In the Holy Land, the Centre and Pivot around which the institutions of a world-encompassing Administrative Order revolve, steps have been taken for the preparation of a Synopsis, and for the Codification of the Laws, of the Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, as an essential prelude to the eventual translation and publication of its entire text.

A Fund has been inaugurated in anticipation of the adoption of preliminary measures for the ultimate construction of Bahá'u'lláh's Sepulcher in the heart of the Haram-i-Aqdas recently established in the plain of Akká.

The international Bahá'í endowments on Mt. Carmel have been greatly enhanced by the signature of a contract with the Israeli Authorities for the acquisition of an area of thirty-six thousand square meters, situated on the promontory of Mt. Carmel, overlooking the Cave of Elijah, as well as the spot sanctified by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh and associated with the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel, for the price of one hundred and eight thousand dollars, to serve as the site for the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Holy Land, the entire sum having been donated by Amelia Collins, Hand of the Cause and outstanding benefactress of the Faith.

The vast area surrounding the Báb's Sepulcher has been enlarged through the purchase from the Development Authority of the State of Israel, of five houses, adjoining the last terrace of His Shrine for a sum of approximately sixty thousand dollars, as well as through the acquisition of a six thousand dollar plot that has been registered in the name of the Israeli Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles; of a house, valued at ten thousand dollars, that has been registered in the name of the Israeli Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada; of a twenty-eight thousand dollar plot, to be registered in the name of the Israeli Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Persia; and of a five thousand dollar plot to be registered in the name of the Israeli Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, steps are now being taken for the purchase of several properties, valued at approximately one hundred and forty thousand dollars, the acquisition of which is essential for the safeguarding of the area in the close vicinity of the Báb's Sepulcher, as well as for the future extension of the arc around which the edifices, destined to serve as the seat of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth, are to be erected.

Following the expropriation by the Israeli Finance Minister, on the recommendation of the Mayor of the City of Haifa, of the plot adjoining the site of the future International Bahá'í Archives on Mt. Carmel, the fixing of the position of the far-flung arc, around which the edifices constituting the Seat of the World Bahá'í Administrative Order are to be built, the location of the site of the building and the preparations for the excavation of its foundations, an hundred and twelve thousand dollar contract has been signed in Rome for the quarrying, the dressing and carving of the stones and the fifty-two columns of the building which will amount in weight to over nine hundred tons and are to be shipped within less than two years to the Holy Land.

The landscaping of the extensive area stretching between the Báb's Sepulcher and the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the Purest Branch and their mother, and destined to encircle this Edifice, has been undertaken, adding greatly to the beauty of the surroundings of these consecrated Spots in the heart of God's Holy Mountain.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE CRADLE OF THE FAITH

In the Cradle of the Faith, the site of the Síyáh-Chál, the scene of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission and the second holiest spot in His native land, purchased in the course of the first year of the Ten-Year Plan, has been transferred by the donor of this holy and historic place, Habib Sabet, to the name of one of the Hands of the Cause acting as my official representative in that country.

A five-year Plan has been inaugurated for the purpose of raising twelve million túmans for the construction of the first Mashriq'l-Adhkár in that land. The design of this historic Edifice has been finally selected from among a number of designs submitted by Bahá'í Architects in both the East and the West, the choice falling upon the plan conceived by the Hand of the Cause and President of the International Bahá'í Council, Mason Remey—a design which incorporates a dome reminiscent of that of the Báb's Holy Sepulcher.

A contract has moreover been signed as a preliminary step for the eventual purchase of the Fortress of Chihríq and its surroundings, for a sum of over two hundred thousand túmans.

GOALS ATTAINED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In the United States of America a plot has been acquired in the precincts of the Mother Temple of the West to serve as the site for the construction of a Home for the Aged, and which will constitute the first of the Dependencies to be erected around that holiest Bahá'í House of Worship. Measures have been adopted, and the design authorized, for the completion of the landscaping of the area surrounding that same building. The National Bahá'í Publishing Committee has been converted into a Bahá'í Publishing Trust, functioning under the jurisdiction of the American National Spiritual Assembly. The total number of American Indian tribes with which contact has been established has now reached twenty-two, whilst members of the Apache, the Cherokee, the Omaha, the Oneida, and the Sioux tribes have been enrolled in the American Bahá'í Community. The number of territories, federal districts and states of the United States of America where official authorization for the conduct of Bahá'í marriages has been granted is now twenty-one, whilst the number of localities in that same country where the Bahá'í Holy Days are officially recognized is over twenty-five.

PROPERTIES ACQUIRED AROUND THE WORLD

Land for no less than eight of eleven Temple sites to be acquired according to the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan, and involving an expenditure of eighty thousand dollars has been purchased in the following places: in the holy city of Baghdád, on the banks of the Tigris, blessed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh, of an area of thirty thousand square meters; on the banks of the Nile in Cairo, the centre of both the Arab and Islamic worlds, of an area of seventeen thousand square meters; in Frankfurt, the heart of the European continent, of an area of seventeen thousand square meters; in New Delhi, the capital of India, of an area of sixty-six thousand square meters; in Sydney, the oldest Bahá'í centre in the Australian continent, of an area of

eleven thousand square meters; in Kampala, in the heart of the African continent, of an area of twenty-four thousand square meters; in Johannesburg, the second largest city in the African continent, of an area of six thousand square meters; and in Panama City, the importance of which has been underlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, of an area of twenty thousand square meters.

No less than fourteen national Hazíratu’l-Quds, out of the forty-nine listed in the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan and which are to serve as seats of future Bahá’í National Spiritual Assemblies, have already been purchased, largely through the liberal contributions of the Hand of the Cause, Amelia Collins. These buildings, involving the expenditure of over two hundred thousand dollars, are situated in five continents of the globe; in London, Bern and Vienna in the European continent; in Anchorage, Lima and Panama City in the American continent; in Tokyo, Istanbul, Kábul, Bahrayn and Suva in the Asiatic continent; in Johannesburg and Tunis in the African continent; and in Auckland in the Antipodes. Negotiations for the purchase of three additional Hazíratu’l-Quds, in the cities of Rome, Jakarta and Colombo are moreover under way, while funds, totalling one hundred and thirty thousand dollars have been pledged for the purchase, in the immediate future, of twenty-seven other Hazíratu’l-Quds in Latin America and the European continent.

Furthermore, the sum of fifty thousand dollars has been contributed by the Hand of the Cause, Amelia Collins, as yet another evidence of her munificence, for the purpose of establishing Bahá’í national endowments in no less than fifty countries, situated in all five continents of the globe. A plot has, moreover, been purchased in South Africa, a property offered in the Aleutian Islands and a fund initiated for the same purpose in Alaska and Finland.

SIXTEEN NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES BY RIDVÁN, 1957

Such marvelous progress, involving such diversified activities, extending over so immense a field, within such a brief space of time, and notwithstanding the smallness of the numbers of the participants

in this Global Crusade, the meagerness of their resources and the restrictions imposed upon them by those who are either unsympathetic to their Cause, or alarmed by their rising influence, or envious of the pervasive power of the Faith they champion, impels me to announce, in anticipation of the opening of the third phase of the Ten-Year Plan, the formation, during Riḍván, 1957, in addition to the three Regional National Spiritual Assemblies to be elected in 1956 in the African continent, of thirteen National Spiritual Assemblies, some of which will be regional, others independent, some interim and others permanent.

These National Spiritual Assemblies, representing no less than forty-two territories will be established in four continents of the globe. Four will be in Asia: in Japan, in Pakistan, in the Arabian Peninsula and in South-East Asia. Three will be in Europe: in Scandinavia and Finland, in the Benelux countries and in the Iberian Peninsula. Five will be in America: the first, combining within its jurisdiction the Republics of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia; the second, comprising the Republics of Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela; the third including Mexico and the Republics of Central America, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama; the fourth embracing the Islands of the Greater Antilles, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and the fifth in Alaska. And lastly, one will be in the Antipodes, in the Dominion of New Zealand.

Responsibility for the convocation of the eight Bahá'í Conventions, whose delegates are to elect eight National Spiritual Assemblies in North, Central and South America and in Europe, and which are to be held in Anchorage, in Panama City, in Port-au-Prince, in Buenos Aires, in Lima, in Stockholm, in Brussels and in Madrid, will devolve upon the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America; for the convocation of the four conventions whose delegates are to elect four National Spiritual Assemblies in Asia, and which are to be held in Tokyo, in Karachi, in Bahrayn and in Jakarta, upon the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America, of Persia, and of India, Pakistan and Burma; and for the convocation of the convention whose delegates are to elect the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, which is to be held in

Auckland, upon the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand.

HANDS OF THE CAUSE TO ATTEND HISTORIC CONVENTIONS

I call upon the following Hands of the Cause to act as my representatives at these thirteen historic conventions, that are to pave the way for the erection, in four continents of the globe, of the pillars destined to support, in varying measure, the Universal House of Justice, the final unit in the construction of the edifice of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh: Valíyu'lláh Varqá and Horace Holley at the South American Conventions to be held in Buenos Aires and Lima respectively; Corinne True at the Greater Antilles Convention to be held in Port-au-Prince; Dhikru'lláh Khádem at the Central American Convention to be held in Panama City; Paul Haney at the Alaska Convention, to be held in Anchorage; Hermann Grossmann and Adelbert Mühlischlegel at the Scandinavian-Finnish Convention to be held in Stockholm; George Townshend at the Benelux Convention to be held in Brussels; Ugo Giachery at the Iberian Convention to be held in Madrid; Tarazu'lláh Samandarí at the Arabian Convention to be held in Bahrain; 'Alí-Akbar Furútan at the Southeast Asian Convention, to be held in Jakarta; Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í at the Pakistani Convention to be held in Karachi; Jalál Kházeh at the Japanese Convention to be held in Tokyo; Clara Dunn at the New Zealand Convention to be held in Auckland.

I urge, moreover, as many members as feasible of the Auxiliary Boards appointed by the aforementioned Hands of the Cause, in the American, the European, the Asiatic and the Australian continents, to attend these momentous gatherings, at which the representatives of as many as forty-two Bahá'í Communities will assemble, and, through their active participation, reinforce and widen the scope of the deliberations of the elected delegates.

Furthermore, I cannot too strongly emphasize the vital necessity for all the Bahá'í groups, scattered throughout these forty-two countries, to brace themselves, and make a supreme effort, during these

intervening two years, to achieve assembly status, ensuring thereby their participation in the election of the delegates to these fate-laden conventions, and contributing, through this act, to the broadening and strengthening of the foundations of these projected pivotal institutions, destined to play so prominent and vital a part in ushering in the last phase in the gradual establishment of the structure of an Administrative Order that must needs slowly evolve into the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and which in turn will give birth, in the fullness of time, to a world spiritual civilization, which posterity will hail as the fairest fruit of His Revelation.

GUARDIAN'S APPEAL TO UPHOLDERS OF THE FAITH

Finally, I direct my appeal, through the assembled delegates, to the entire body of the believers whom they represent, and indeed, on this occasion, to all the upholders of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh wherever they reside in all the continents of the globe, to arise, at so auspicious an hour in the fortunes of the Faith, synchronizing with so fateful and perilous an hour in the fortunes of mankind, and consecrate themselves afresh, throughout this last, fast-fleeting year of the present phase of this momentous, world-girdling Plan, to the furtherance of the immediate objectives enumerated in my last year's Convention Message, ensuring thereby a befitting conclusion to a stage in its resistless unfoldment destined to usher in its third and most brilliant phase—a phase on which the triumphant consummation of the Plan itself must so largely depend.

It is indeed my fervent and constant prayer that the members of this firmly-knit, intensely alive, world-embracing Community, spurred on by the triple impulse generated through the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel by Bahá'u'lláh and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine Plan bequeathed by the Centre of His Covenant—the three Charters which have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Centre and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá'í world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order—may advance from strength to strength and victory to victory. May they hasten, by their present

exertions, the advent of that blissful consummation when the shackles hampering the growth of their beloved Faith will have been finally burst asunder, when its independent status will have been officially and universally recognized, when it will have ascended the throne and wielded the scepter of spiritual and temporal authority, when the brightness of its glory will have illuminated the whole earth, and its dominion will have been established over the entire planet.

—Shoghi

[April, 1955]

30 April 1955

Achievements—Supplementary Report

Share National Assemblies following announcement supplementing message recently addressed to delegates of the Bahá'í Conventions.

Annual elections of the second year, second decade, of the second Bahá'í century, were signalized by the formation of the first historic local Assemblies in communities as diversified and far apart as Mecca, Qiblih of Islamic world, Muscat and Riyadh, situated on the shore and in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula; in the Bahamas, British West Indies; in Diu Island, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Sargodha, Saigon, in Southeast Asia; Monte Carlo, Basel, Mongat, Orleans, Marseilles, Bergen, Cologne, in Europe; in Reunion Island, Zanzibar, Seychelles, Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean; in the holy cities of Kazímayn and Najaf, strongholds of Shí'ih orthodoxy in 'Iraq, in addition to the group already established in Karbila; Teneriffe and Las Palmas, in the Atlantic Ocean.

Africa alone boasts the establishment of above seventy new Assemblies, raising the total number established since the launching of the systematic simultaneous teaching campaigns on the African continent four years ago to well above one hundred. Uganda in particular achieved the unique, memorable feat of the formation of seventeen new Assemblies, swelling number of Assemblies to forty-one, localities to over hundred, total believers to almost nine hundred.

The sacred dust of the Báb's infant son, extolled in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá was respectfully and ceremoniously transferred on the anniversary of his Father's martyrdom, in the presence of pilgrims and resident believers to the Bahá'í cemetery in Shíráz, the prelude to

the translation to the same spot of the remains of the Báb's beloved and long-suffering consort.

Five additional incorporations of local Assemblies, including Suva, Fiji.

A pioneer has embarked for Loyalty Island, the last remaining unopened island in the Pacific Ocean outside the Soviet orbit.

Negotiations for the purchase of national Hazíras in Colombo and Jakarta are nearing completion.

Preliminary steps have been undertaken for the establishment of a Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Tihrán.

The design for the Mother Temple in the cradle of the Faith was unveiled in the presence of pilgrims and resident believers assembled within the Haram-i-Aqdas on the first day of Riḍván.

—Shoghi

[Cablegram, April 30, 1955]

April 1956

SO SIGNIFICANT A VICTORY

The triumphant termination of the second phase of the decade-long global Spiritual Crusade on which the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have so auspiciously embarked impels me to share with the delegates assembled at the Annual Bahá'í Conventions convened in all the continents of the globe the feelings of joy, of pride and of thankfulness which so significant a victory has evoked in my heart.

A REMARKABLE VICTORY

The year that has just ended—a year which posterity cannot fail to regard as one of the most eventful and challenging in the annals of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation—has been overshadowed, in the course of its opening months, by a sudden and highly menacing crisis in the fortunes of this Faith, a crisis which, though as yet not fully resolved, has already led to a remarkable victory over the combined forces of its traditional adversaries in the land of its birth, who, for more than a century, have plotted assiduously to disrupt its foundations, tarnish its glory and extinguish its light. A long-abused, down-trodden, sorely tried community, constituting the overwhelming majority of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, subjected recently to the strain and stress of a violent recrudescence of persecution, which was marked throughout by intense vilification, intimidation, spoliation, expulsion, arson, rape, and murder, has emerged triumphant from yet another gruelling experience—a testing period of exceptional severity—its unity unbroken, its confidence reinforced, its prestige considerably enhanced, its fame noised abroad to an unprecedented degree, its administrative agencies unshaken, its endowments unimpaired, and the grim, boastful and reiterated threats of its sworn enemies to outlaw it through formal legislative action, confiscate its property, demolish its edifices, imprison and deport its

members, and extirpate it, root and branch, in the native land of its Founder unenforced.

PROGRESSIVE UNFOLDMENT OF THE TEN-YEAR CRUSADE

Simultaneous with this marvelous, awe-inspiring interposition of Providence, at this critical stage in the mysterious evolution and the resistless progress of God's infant Faith in the land of its birth, towards the two shining goals of complete emancipation from the shackles of religious orthodoxy and of state recognition, an equally significant development can be noted, during the last twelve-month, in the progressive unfoldment, beyond the confines of this storm-tossed land, and stretching to the farthest corners of the earth, of the Ten-Year Plan, now entering upon the third, and what promises to be the most brilliant, phase in its execution.

This world-encompassing enterprise, embarked upon, three years ago, on the occasion of the world-wide celebrations commemorating the centenary of the birth of the Mission of the Founder of our Faith, has, in all phases of its operation, throughout five continents, as well as the islands of the seas, gathered swift momentum, and is demonstrating, in both its territorial and institutional aspects, a vitality, and has registered successes, that have far exceeded the expectations of even the most sanguine among its promoters.

The number of localities into which the light of this unconquerable Faith, now radiating the splendor of its glory over the face of the planet, has penetrated, has swelled to well nigh thirty-seven hundred, marking an increase of almost five hundred in the course of a single year. The number of Sovereign States and Chief Dependencies included within its pale, which multiplied with such amazing swiftness during the opening year of this World-Crusade, has now risen to two hundred and forty-seven through the arrival of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Udai Narain Singh, Frank Wyss and Daniel Haumont, in Tibet, in Cocos Island and Loyalty Islands, respectively, as well as through the opening of Laos and Cambodia and of the Islands of Pemba, Fernando Po, Trinidad and Corisco—territories not included in the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan,—and as a result of

information recently received indicating the presence of a few believers in the Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The number of local Spiritual Assemblies now functioning throughout the length and breadth of the Bahá'í World exceeds nine hundred. Every single country listed in the Plan within the confines of every continent of the globe, with the exception of those within the Soviet Orbit, are now opened to the Faith. All islands figuring in that Plan, over seventy in number, situated in the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Indian Oceans, in the Mediterranean and the North Sea, have, likewise been opened except Nicobar Islands, Chagos Archipelago, Hainan Island, Sakhalin Island, Spitzbergen and Anticosti Island. The number of the islands of the globe to which the Message of Bahá'u'lláh has been carried since its inception now totals ninety-eight. In the Pacific Ocean alone the number of opened territories is now over forty, while the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside exceeds one hundred and seventy. The number of languages into which Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated has now reached one hundred and ninety, no less than thirty-four of which are to be regarded as supplementary to those included in the provisions of the Plan.

FAST-AWAKENING CONTINENT OF AFRICA

In the Continent of Africa and in its neighboring islands, in both the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith has passed the three thousand mark; over two thousand five hundred of whom belong to the Negro race. The number of territories opened to the Faith in that fast-awakening continent and its neighboring islands has risen to fifty-eight, while the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside is over four hundred. The number of tribes represented in the Bahá'í Community is now over one hundred and forty, the number of local Assemblies already established is over one hundred and twenty, and the number of languages into which Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated exceeds fifty.

FORTY-THREE NATIONAL HAZÍRATU'L-QUDS

The number of incorporated Assemblies, both local and national, in various continents of the globe, has been raised to one hundred and sixty-eight, the latest additions being the Italo-Swiss National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Brussels, Tokyo, Liverpool, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Quincy, Basel, Zürich, Geneva, Heidelberg, Buenos Aires, Saigon, Suva, Malacca and Addis Ababa. The number of National Hazíratu'l-Quds, the precursors of Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies, acquired in the capitals and leading cities of North, Central and South America, of the goal countries of Europe, of Africa, Asia and Australasia, and of several islands of the globe, has reached forty-three, involving the expenditure of over half a million dollars, amply compensating for the seizure and occupation of the National Administrative Headquarters of the Faith and the demolition of its dome by the military authorities in the Persian capital.

TEMPLE SITES AND ENDOWMENTS

Land for ten Temple sites has moreover been acquired at a cost of no less than one hundred thousand dollars, while negotiations are well advanced for the acquisition of the one remaining Temple site to be purchased in the Swedish capital. In no less than thirty of the fifty-one countries listed in the Ten-Year Plan, National Bahá'í endowments estimated as having a value of one hundred thousand dollars have been acquired, outstanding among them being the Maxwell Home honored by the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá while in Montreal, which has been transferred by the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá to the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly. Efforts are moreover being strenuously exerted for the establishment of similar endowments in the twenty-one remaining countries. Following the completion and adoption of the design for the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in the cradle of the Faith, steps have been taken for the preparation of no less than three additional designs, one for the Temple scheduled to be erected in the heart of the European Continent, another for the one to be erected in the near future in the African Continent, and the third for the one contemplated for Australasia, paving the way thereby in each of the remaining continents of the globe for the erection of a House to be consecrated

to the worship of the one true God, and to the glory and honor of His Messenger for this Day.

DEVELOPMENT OF BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

In the Holy Land, the centre and pivot round which the divinely appointed, fast multiplying institutions of a world-encircling, resistlessly marching Faith revolve, the double process, so noticeable in recent years, involving a rapid decline in the fortunes of the breakers of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and proclaiming the rise of the institutions of its World Administrative Centre, in the shadow of His Shrine, has been accelerated on the one hand, through the death, in miserable circumstances, of the treacherous and malignant Majdi'd-Dín, the last survivor of the principal instigators of the rebellion against the Will of the Founder of our Faith, and, on the other, through the laying of the foundation, and the erection of some of the pillars, of the facade and of the northern side of the International Bahá'í Archives—the first of the major edifices destined to constitute the seat of the World Bahá'í Administrative Centre to be established on Mt. Carmel. No less than thirty of the fifty-two pillars, each over seven meters high, of this imposing and strikingly beautiful edifice have already been raised, whilst half of the nine hundred tons of stone ordered in Italy for its construction have already been safely delivered at the Port of Haifa. A contract, moreover, for over fifteen thousand dollars has been placed with a tile factory in Utrecht for the manufacture of over seven thousand green tiles designed to cover the five hundred square meters of the roof of the building.

Coincident with these building operations an extensive plot, adjoining the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf has, after protracted and difficult negotiations, been purchased for the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, for the purpose of extending and safeguarding, on the one hand, the area of the international Bahá'í endowments on Mt. Carmel, and of providing, on the other, the much needed space for the extension and completion of the far-flung arc around which the edifices of the World Bahá'í Administrative Order are to be built. The recently acquired area surrounding the holiest Shrine in the Bahá'í World and its appointed Qiblih in the plain of Akká has been further

extended through the purchase from the Development Authority of the State of Israel of a dilapidated house, situated south of the Mansion and blessed by the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and in which He was wont to receive His friends, amongst them the first party of western Bahá’í pilgrims to arrive in the Holy Land after the passing of Bahá’u’lláh. To these latest acquisitions must be added the purchase of another plot situated in the neighborhood of the Báb’s Sepulcher and adjoining the area surrounding the future seat of the World Bahá’í Administrative Order, raising thereby the total area of the international Bahá’í endowments in the Holy Land to over four hundred thousand square meters. Furthermore, the necessary formalities have been completed in connection with the purchase of the site of the future Mashriqu’l-Adhkár on Mt. Carmel, while the transfer of the title deeds of recently acquired plots to the name of the Israel branches of the United States, the British, the Persian, the Canadian and Australian Bahá’í National Spiritual Assemblies is being expeditiously carried out.

EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States of America, the home of the champion-builders of a fast-evolving Order, an official invitation was extended to the Bahá’í Community by the San Francisco Council of Churches to send representatives to attend a Service of Prayer for Peace and Divine Guidance to the United Nations, an invitation to which the Community warmly responded. At this inter-religious gathering, held in the Cow Palace in San Francisco, the birthplace of the Charter of the United Nations, which united nearly sixteen thousand people in worship and silent prayers, and at which government leaders, among them the United States Secretary of State, were present, the voice of the Bahá’í representative was the first to be raised, reciting a prayer revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, after whom a prayer was read by each of the representatives of the Christian, the Muslim, the Jewish, the Hindu, and the Buddhist Faiths, all of whom were similarly invited to participate in that immense and historic gathering. A prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for America was presented by the elected national representatives of the United States Bahá’í Community to President Eisenhower, who acknowledged its receipt in warm terms and above his own signature.

Nor should mention be omitted in this brief survey of Bahá'í victories and achievements in the course of the closing year of the second phase of the Ten-Year Plan of the establishment of a Bahá'í Publishing Trust in India; of the establishment of over thirty new centres and fifteen Assemblies in India, Pakistan and Burma; of the purchase of some of the holy sites blessed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople, the Land of Mystery and the scene of the proclamation of His Message; of the holding of the first Bahá'í Summer School in Central Africa, in Kobuka, Uganda, attended by about one hundred African and white believers and representatives of no less than twenty-eight Bahá'í local Assemblies; of the convocation of the first historic All-France Teaching Conference, the first fruit of the combined labors of the believers of about thirty centres already established throughout the length and breadth of that country; of the setting apart of a plot to serve as a burial-ground for the members of the Bahá'í community in Tripoli, Libya and in the capital of Tanganyika; of the purchase of land for the establishment of a Bahá'í Summer School in 'Irâq; of the extension to the Bahá'í women in Egypt of the right to be elected to the Egyptian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly as well as to participate as delegates in the National Bahá'í Convention; of the purchase, in an island near Muara Siberut, Mentawai Islands, of a plot supplementing the Bahá'í endowment established in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital; of the pushing of the northern outpost of the Faith in Alaska to Point Barrow beyond the Arctic Circle; of the initiation of auxiliary plans for the promotion of the Faith in the Seychelles Islands and in the Sudan; and of the arrival of a pioneer in Praslin Island forming a part of the Seychelles group.

APPEAL TO UNITED NATIONS

Nor can I in this survey allow to pass unnoticed the energetic and commendable efforts exerted by Bahá'í communities the world over for the support, protection and relief of the persecuted members of the Persian Bahá'í Community subjected to one of the severest ordeals experienced in recent years by the steadfast followers of the Faith in the land of its birth. Following this barbarous recrudescence of

religious persecution and the transmission of over one thousand messages by Bahá'í communities, some in writing and others telegraphically, to His Majesty the Sháh, the Government, the Majlis and the Senate, and reinforcing the wide publicity given in the world's leading newspapers and the numerous protests voiced by scholars, statesmen, government envoys and people of eminence such as Pandit Nehru, Eleanor Roosevelt, Professor Gilbert Murray and Professor A. Toynbee, a written communication accompanied by a memorandum listing the atrocities perpetrated throughout the Persian provinces, was submitted in Geneva to the Secretary General of the United Nations, who appointed a commission of United Nations officers, headed by the High Commissioner for Refugees, instructing its members to contact the Persian Foreign Minister and urge him to obtain from his government in Tíhrán a formal assurance that the rights of the Bahá'í minority in that land would be protected. Copies of this communication addressed to the United Nations were delivered to the representatives of the member nations of the Social and Economic Council, to the Director of the Human Rights Division, and to certain specialized agencies of non-governmental organizations with consultative status. Furthermore, the American President was appealed to by the national representatives of the American Bahá'í Communities as well as by all local Assemblies and groups in the United States. A courteous and reassuring letter was subsequently received by the American Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly from the State Department in Washington, acknowledging the receipt of the appeal, while the Director of the Division of Human Rights addressed in his turn a communication to the Secretary of the American National Spiritual Assembly, informing him that summaries of both the letter and petition forwarded to him would be furnished to the Commission of Human Rights, and copies sent to the Persian Government. Assurance was moreover given that summaries would also be sent to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. As a further measure to obtain redress a forty-thousand dollar publicity campaign was initiated by the American Bahá'í Community designed to lend an impetus to the proclamation of the fundamental verities of the Faith, the aims and purposes of its followers, and of the disabilities suffered by the overwhelming majority of its adherents in the land of its birth.

Nor can I refrain from emphasizing in this rapid survey the highly significant fact that in over sixty territories, constituting more than a half of the total number of virgin territories opened to the Faith, since the inauguration of the World Spiritual Crusade, the number of those who have espoused the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and enlisted under His banner has surpassed the number originally anticipated and regarded as a minimum for the opening of these territories; that in a considerable proportion of them the Bahá'í membership has far exceeded the number required for the formation of local Assemblies; that in Gambia as many as three hundred, and in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as many as five hundred, have been and are being enrolled beneath His standard; and that in Uganda alone, which holds the palm of victory, the number of registered believers has exceeded one thousand.

NEXT PHASE OF WORLD CRUSADE

Such heart-warming, soul-stirring examples of Bahá'í initiative and enterprise; such splendid testimonies to Bahá'í solidarity, perseverance, courage, fortitude, and self-sacrifice, displayed in rapid succession, and over so immense an area of the globe's surface, and in the face of mounting opposition on the part of those who envy the ever widening glory of the Faith or fear the influence of its all-pervasive power, have shed on the opening chapter of this Crusade a luster which the passing of time can never tarnish. The third phase of this momentous enterprise—the opening of which is, at this hour, being signaled by the emergence of no less than three additional Regional Bahá'í Assemblies in the African Continent—must cast on the annals of this prodigious Crusade an illumination of such brilliancy as will eclipse the splendor of this luster.

The glorious and stupendous work already accomplished, singly and collectively, in the course of three brief years, in five continents of the globe and the islands of the seas, both at home and abroad, in the teaching as well as the administrative spheres of Bahá'í activity must, as the army of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders marches forward into new and vaster fields to capture still greater heights, never be jeopardized or allowed to lag or suffer a setback. The prizes so arduously won

should not only be jealously preserved but should be constantly enriched. Far from suffering the long and distinguished record of feats which have been achieved to be tarnished, assiduous efforts must be exerted to ennoble it with every passing day.

The newly opened territories of the globe must, under no circumstances, be allowed to relapse into the state of spiritual deprivation from which they have so recently and laboriously been rescued. Nay, the highly edifying evidences proclaiming the expansion and the consolidation of the superb historic work achieved in so many of these territories must be rapidly multiplied. The local assemblies that have been so diligently and patiently established must under no circumstances be allowed to dissolve, or their foundations be in any way endangered. The mighty and steady process involving the increase in the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith, and the multiplication of isolated centres, groups and local assemblies must, throughout this newly opened phase of the Plan, be markedly accelerated. The incorporation of local assemblies must proceed with a rapidity that will throw into shade the progress achieved in this respect during the first two phases of the Plan. The remaining unopened territories of the globe outside the Soviet orbit, now confined to no more than four lonely islands, must with the least possible delay, be won over to the ever spreading dominion of Bahá'u'lláh, consummating thereby the most far-reaching and thrilling of all the enterprises launched through the concerted efforts of His valiant followers. The one remaining Temple site destined to be bought in the Swedish capital must be speedily acquired. The six remaining Hazíratu'l-Quds, some in Latin America, others in the European continent, must likewise be rapidly established. The Bahá'í endowments in the countries still deprived of the benefits of this divinely appointed institution must be forthwith purchased. The task of completing the translation of Bahá'í literature into the languages listed in the provisions of the Plan must be carried out with renewed determination and vigor. The Bahá'í Publishing Trusts that are as yet unestablished must be founded at the earliest possible opportunity. The sacred obligation of purchasing the remaining chief historic sites in the birthplace of the Faith, and particularly the scenes of the Báb's incarceration and martyrdom, must be discharged as expeditiously as possible. The search now being conducted for the purpose of identifying the resting-places of the Father of Bahá'u'lláh, of the

Mother and the Cousin of the Báb must be pursued with the utmost diligence and circumspection. The construction of the Mother Temple of Europe, so vital and yet so long overdue, must be speedily commenced, whilst a parallel effort must be exerted in Africa for the erection, without delay, of a similar institution which the phenomenal progress of the Faith in that continent has made imperative. The Construction of the Home for the Aged, marking the inauguration of the first of the Dependencies of the Holiest House of Worship in the Bahá'í world, must, now that the site in the proximity of the Temple has been acquired, be started and expeditiously carried forward. The process of incorporating the newly formed National Spiritual Assemblies, whether regional or independent, must be initiated soon after their formation, and should be continually stimulated with every increase in the number of these assemblies in all the continents of the globe. Above all, an effort unprecedented in its range and intensity, must be exerted for the speedy multiplication of local spiritual assemblies in all the territories where National Spiritual Assemblies, whether independent or regional, provisional or permanent, are to be established, for the purpose of broadening and strengthening the foundations on which these potent national institutions—the pillars of the future Universal House of Justice—must rest. Immediate attention should be focused on the multiplication of such institutions in areas where these National Spiritual Assemblies are to be established in the near future, such as South and Central America, the Arabian Peninsula, Southeast Asia, Pákistán, Alaska, Japan, New Zealand, Scandinavia and Finland, the Benelux countries, the Iberian Peninsula and France, as well as those territories in which national assemblies are to be established at a later stage in the course of the unfoldment of the present phase of the Plan, and the date of the formation of which will, to a large extent, depend on the rapidity with which these local assemblies are formed.

A MAJOR TURNING POINT

The Crusade, on which the army of the Lord of Hosts has so joyously and confidently embarked, now stands at a major turning point in the history of its marvelous unfoldment. Three years of magnificent exploits, achieved for the propagation of the light of an immortal and infinitely precious Faith and for the strengthening of the fabric of its

Administrative Order, now lie behind it. A spirit of abnegation and self-sacrifice, so rare that only the spirit of the Dawn-breakers of a former age can be said to have surpassed it, has consistently animated, singly as well as collectively, its participants in every clime, of all classes, of either sex, and of every age. A treasure, immense in its range has been willingly and lovingly expended to insure its systematic and successful prosecution. Already a few heroic souls have either quaffed the cup of martyrdom, or laid down their lives, or been subjected to divers ordeals while combating for its Cause. Its repercussions have spread so far as to alarm a not inconsiderable element among the traditional and redoubtable adversaries of its courageous and consecrated prosecutors. Indeed as it has forged ahead, it has raised up new enemies intent on obstructing its forward march and on defeating its purpose. Premonitory signs can already be discerned in far-off regions heralding the approach of the day when troops will flock to its standard, fulfilling the predictions uttered long ago by the Supreme Captain of its forces.

Before the eyes of the warriors enlisting under its banner stretch fields of exploration and consolidation of such vastness as might well dazzle the eyes and strike awe into the heart of any soul less robust than those who have arisen to identify themselves with its Cause. The heights its champions must scale are indeed formidable. The pitfalls that bestrew their path are still numerous. The road leading to ultimate and total victory is tortuous, stony and narrow. Theirs, however, is the emphatic assurance, revealed by the Pen of the Most High—the Prime Mover of the forces unleashed by this world-girdling Crusade—that “Whosoever ariseth to aid our Cause God will render him victorious over ten times ten thousand souls, and, should he wax in his love for Me, him will We cause to triumph over all that is in heaven and all that is on earth.”

Putting on the armor of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet

unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.

—Shoghi

[April, 1956]

April 1957

EVIDENCES OF THE RESISTLESS MARCH OF THE WORLD CRUSADE

At this auspicious hour, marking yet another milestone in the progress of the divinely-guided, world-embracing, steadily consolidating Community of the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, I feel once again impelled to share with the elected representatives of the vast majority of its avowed supporters, assembled on the occasion of the convocation of the twenty-four Bahá'í Conventions being held simultaneously in the American, the European, the Asiatic, the African, and the Australian continents, the latest evidences of its resistless march along the path traced for it by both its Founder and the appointed Centre of His Covenant.

The year that has just expired, signalized, at the hour of its birth, by the emergence of three regional spiritual assemblies, on the northern fringes, in the heart, and at the southern extremity of the long dormant African continent, and ushering in the third phase of a decade-long, world-encompassing Spiritual Crusade, has, as we look back on the triumphs and trials that have marked its course, accelerated, to a notable extent, the two parallel processes of integration and disintegration associated respectively with the rising fortunes of God's infant Faith and the sinking fortunes of the institutions of a declining civilization.

Indeed, as we gaze in retrospect beyond the immediate past, and survey, in however cursory a manner, the vicissitudes afflicting an increasingly tormented society, and recall the strains and stresses to which the fabric of a dying Order has been increasingly subjected, we cannot but marvel at the sharp contrast presented, on the one hand, by the accumulated evidences of the orderly unfoldment, and the

uninterrupted multiplication of the agencies, of an Administrative Order designed to be the harbinger of a world civilization, and, on the other, by the ominous manifestations of acute political conflict, of social unrest, of racial animosity, of class antagonism, of immorality and of irreligion, proclaiming, in no uncertain terms, the corruption and obsolescence of the institutions of a bankrupt Order.

PORTENTOUS PROPHECIES

Against the background of these afflictive disturbances—the turmoil and tribulations of a travailing age—we may well ponder the portentous prophecies uttered well-nigh fourscore years ago, by the Author of our Faith, as well as the dire predictions made by Him Who is the unerring Interpreter of His teachings, all foreshadowing a universal commotion, of a scope and intensity unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

The violent derangement of the world's equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth—these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day—a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly-knit world-embracing Fellowship—a Fellowship destined, in the fullness of time, to be incorporated in the framework, and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences, of a mysteriously expanding, divinely appointed Order, and to flower, in the course of future Dispensations, into a Civilization, the like of which mankind has, at no stage in its evolution, witnessed.

Parallel with this process of progressive deterioration in human affairs, now visibly gathering momentum outside the pale of the Faith

of Bahá'u'lláh, and recalling the convulsions which, on a far more restricted scale, seized a declining empire in the opening centuries of the Christian era, far less spectacular in its manifestation, has been the process of integration, as demonstrated by the increasing cohesion, the multiplication, and the reinforcement of the foundations, of the institutions of the embryonic Bahá'í World Order, which, now, under the impact of the forces released by a World Spiritual Crusade, deriving its authority from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and launched for the express purpose of executing the Divine Plan bequeathed by Him to His followers in the evening of His life, is contributing, unnoticed by a generation forgetful of its God, and already in the shadow of His Visitation, to the building up, slowly but irresistibly, of that Ark of human salvation, ordained as the ultimate haven of a society destined, for the most part, to be submerged by the tidal wave of the abuses and evils which its own perversity has engendered.

VICTORY OVER ECCLESIASTICAL FORCES

The fourth year of this Ten-Year Crusade, endowed with such tremendous potentialities, has witnessed, in the Cradle of the Faith, and in direct consequence of the strenuous, the concerted and persistent efforts exerted by the champion-builders of this embryonic World Order, holding aloft the standard of an unconquerable Faith in the American and European continents, and reinforced by the voice of men of eminence in both the East and the West, and, particularly, by responsible officials, occupying high positions in various agencies of the United Nations, a victory over the ecclesiastical forces leagued against it and a fanatical population determined to extirpate it root and branch—a victory which must rank as one of the most striking among those won in the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The numerous properties, serving, for the most part, as the administrative headquarters of the Faith, and scattered throughout the provinces of that sorely tried land, outstanding among which is the House of the Báb in Shíráz—the holiest spot in that country, the scene of the birth of His Revelation, and the ordained Centre of Pilgrimage—have, pursuant to orders issued by the central authorities in Tihrán, been returned to their owners, despite the protests of a relentless and powerful clergy, the agitation of a hostile population, and the importunate demands made by prominent members of the Legislature to outlaw and disendow the Faith, confiscate its literature, raze to the ground its principal edifices, deport its chief supporters, and root it out of the provinces. A firm and categorical assurance has, moreover, been given by the Chief Magistrate and the head of his Cabinet to the national representatives of the Persian Bahá'í Community that their national administrative headquarters in Tihrán, together with all its furnishings, books and documents, which have thus far been kept intact in that edifice, will be restored.

Whilst so conspicuous a victory was being registered by a persecuted Faith in the land of its birth over the combined forces of its traditional adversaries, its stalwart standard-bearers, in both hemispheres, have, in accordance with their solemn pledges, given at the time of the inception of the Ten-Year Crusade, been pursuing their historic task

of enlarging the orbit, and of consolidating the institutions, of a rapidly maturing Administrative Order.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF WORLD CRUSADE

The number of territories included within the pale of the Faith, embracing all the sovereign states and chief dependencies of the planet, has now, in consequence of this prodigious effort, been raised to two hundred and fifty-one, as a result of the opening of the island of Anticosti, in the North Atlantic Ocean, by the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Mary Zabolotny, of the arrival of a pioneer in Mafia Island, off the coast of Tanganyika, and of the news received recently of the presence of a few followers of the Faith in the Soviet Republics of Tádzhíkistán and of Kirgizia, almost doubling, within the space of four years, the total number of territories opened in the course of eleven decades of Bahá'í history. Of the hundred and thirty-one territories listed in the Ten-Year Plan, only Spitzbergen, Nicobar Islands and the Chagos Archipelago, as well as eleven territories, which are either incorporated in the Soviet Union or are included within its orbit, remain to be opened by the band of intrepid warriors intent upon enlarging the limits, and spreading far and wide the fame, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Every single territory of the hundred and twenty, mentioned by the Author of the Divine Plan in His memorable Tablets, is now opened to His Father's Faith, proclaiming the exemplary fidelity of His followers to the dearest wishes expressed by the Centre of the Covenant in those Tablets.

The total number of localities where the followers of the Most Great Name now reside has, as a result of their unprecedented scattering over the surface of the globe, exceeded the forty-two hundred mark, representing an increase of no less than a thousand centres in the course of the last two years. Of these localities—foci of the warming and healing light of an all-conquering Revelation—over a hundred are now established in Australasia, over a hundred and ten in the British Isles, over a hundred and ten in the Goal Countries of Europe, over a hundred and ten in the Dominion of Canada, over a hundred and thirty in Latin America, over a hundred and thirty in Germany and Austria, over a hundred and forty in the Indian subcontinent, over two hundred and ten in the Pacific area, over five hundred and fifty in the

African continent, over nine hundred and eighty in Persia, over fourteen hundred and sixty in the United States of America.

The northernmost outpost of the Faith has now been pushed far beyond the Arctic Circle, as far as 76 degrees latitude, in consequence of the arrival of William Carr, a Canadian believer, in Thule, Greenland, a settlement situated three degrees above Arctic Bay, Franklin, the most northerly centre hitherto established in the Bahá'í world.

The number of local spiritual assemblies organized in all the continents of the globe, constituting the broad and indestructible foundation of the edifice of a rising Order, now exceeds one thousand, an increase of more than a hundred in the space of a single year.

The number of islands now within the pale of the Faith, situated in the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Indian Oceans as well as in the Mediterranean and the North Sea, is now over a hundred, seventy-four of which have been opened since the inauguration of the World Spiritual Crusade, including five islands, situated in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and not listed as objectives of the Ten-Year Plan.

The number of languages into which the continually expanding literature of the Faith has been and is being translated has risen to two hundred and thirty, representing an increase of forty in the course of one year. Seventy-five of these languages are included in the ninety-one named in the Ten-Year Plan, while sixty-six have been added to those originally specified in the provisions of that same Plan. Of this widely disseminated literature seven books have been lately presented by an adherent of the Faith residing in Christchurch, New Zealand, to the officer in charge of the American Antarctic Expedition for its library, while others have been dispatched, beyond the Antarctic Circle, as far south as the Expedition's base, at McMurdo Sound, 77 degrees latitude, on the shores of the Ross Sea.

The number of incorporated spiritual assemblies, whether local or national, in all the continents of the globe, has now swelled to one hundred and ninety-five, more than ninety of which are situated in the United States of America. Outstanding among those that have been recently registered are the assemblies of Bern, Switzerland; Frankfurt, Germany; Luxembourg, Luxembourg; Brisbane, Australia; Scarborough, Canada; Aligarh, India; Mastung, Pakistan; Huncayo, Peru; Cochabamba, Bolivia; Colombo, Ceylon; Kuala Lumpur, Malaya; Asmara, Eritrea; Monrovia and Bomi Hills, Liberia; Tuarabu, Gilbert and Ellice Islands; Baro-bai-Amantai, Indonesia; and Simatalu Saibi, Simatalu Ulu, Sipipajet, Mentawai Islands.

Of the forty-nine National Hazíratu'l-Quds enumerated in the Ten-Year Plan all but three have already been established, involving the expenditure of over five hundred and seventy thousand dollars, raising thereby the value of all the edifices, serving as the national administrative headquarters of the Faith in all the continents of the globe, to over two and a half million dollars.

Of the fifty-one countries in which, in accordance with that same Plan, national Bahá'í endowments are to be purchased within the space of a decade, as many as forty-nine have achieved their goals, through the expenditure of a sum estimated at more than one hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

The number of sovereign states, dependencies, as well as territories, federal districts and states of the United States of America, where the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate is recognized is now over thirty, the latest additions being Vietnam, Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Indonesia and Liberia. The number of countries, states as well as cities of the United States, where the Educational Authorities have recognized the Bahá'í Holy Days now exceeds forty-five, among which are included Israel, the British Isles, Samoa, Liberia, Tanganyika, the states of Victoria and of South Australia. Mention in this connection, moreover, should be made of the recognition officially extended by the authorities of H. M. Kitalya Farm Prison in Uganda to its recently converted Bahá'í inmates to observe these same Holy Days.

In the Holy Land—the Qiblih of a world community, the heart from which the energizing influences of a vivifying Faith continually stream, and the seat and centre around which the diversified activities of a divinely appointed Administrative Order revolve—following upon the termination of the construction of the Báb’s holy Sepulcher, marking the closing of the first chapter in the history of the evolution of the central institutions of a world Faith, a marked progress in the rise and establishment of these institutions has been clearly noticeable. The remaining twenty-two pillars of the International Bahá’í Archives—the initial Edifice heralding the establishment of the Bahá’í World Administrative Centre on Mt. Carmel—have been erected. The last half of the nine hundred tons of stone, ordered in Italy for its construction, have reached their destination, enabling the exterior of the building to be completed, while the forty-four tons of glazed green tiles, manufactured in Utrecht, to cover the five hundred square meters of roof, have been placed in position, the whole contributing, to an unprecedented degree, through its colorfulness, its classic style and graceful proportions, and in conjunction with the stately, golden-crowned Mausoleum rising beyond it, to the unfolding glory of the central institutions of a World Faith nestling in the heart of God’s holy mountain.

Simultaneous with this striking development, the plan designed to insure the extension and completion of the arc serving as a base for the erection of future edifices constituting the World Bahá’í Administrative Centre, has been successfully carried out. The dilapidated house, situated in the close neighborhood of Bahá’u’lláh’s Shrine, recently acquired from the Development Authority of the State of Israel, because of its historic associations, has been restored. Negotiations, moreover, have been initiated with that same Authority for the acquisition of two plots to the north and south of the Shrine, for the purpose of safeguarding its precincts from a further extension of the new settlements springing up rapidly in the plain of Akká. Steps have also been taken to register the title-deeds of a centrally located plot, originally owned by a Covenant-breaker, and abutting on the International Archives, in the name of the Israel Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the British Isles. A

further blow has been struck at the remnants of the implacable enemies of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the breakers of His Father’s Covenant, still living in the immediate vicinity of the holiest shrine of the Bahá’í world, through the destruction of a row of ruinous sheds which had been under their control, through orders issued by the Municipal Authorities of Akká. And, lastly, an expropriation order has been published in the Israel Official Gazette by the Treasury Department of Israel related to buildings enclosed within the Haram-i-Aqdas, aiming at the eviction of these same enemies from the outer Sanctuary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Sepulcher, following upon the evacuation by them of the Mansion at Bahjí after two score years of occupancy, and which, when carried out, will mark the final cleansing, after more than sixty-five years, of the immediate surroundings of the holiest Spot in the Bahá’í world.

Nor can I dismiss this subject related to the progress achieved in the development of Bahá’í international institutions in the Holy Land without a special reference to the continual extension and embellishment of the international endowments of the Faith in the plain of Akká and on the slopes of Mt. Carmel, the value of which now exceeds five million two hundred thousand dollars, as well as to the ever-swelling crowds of visitors flocking to the Bahá’í Shrines in both of these places, and particularly to the number of those entering the Tomb of the Báb which, during a single day, in a three-hour period, has exceeded a thousand.

THE TEN-YEAR PLAN IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States of America, the cradle and citadel of the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, the elected national representatives of the American Bahá’í Community, acting as the representatives of the International Bahá’í Community, charged with the defense of the cause of their persecuted brethren in the cradle of the Faith, have energetically pursued their efforts, through representations made to the United Nations officials and agencies in New York and Geneva, through their contact with high-ranking officials of the American State Department and through measures of publicity in the American Press, all culminating in the victory won

over the adversaries of the Faith, to which reference has been made earlier in these pages.

The landscaping of the Temple area, including the operation of the nine fountains, as envisaged by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, has been completed at a cost of two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. The number of visitors who, since public guiding has been instituted, have flocked to the doors of this Mother Temple of the West, now standing amidst such attractive surroundings, has exceeded seven hundred thousand, whilst more than three thousand have entered its doors in the course of a single day. Authorization has moreover been recently given by the Wilmette Village Board for the construction of the Home for the Aged, the first Dependency of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár. The value of national and local endowments owned by, and under the control of, that community, whose members have so spontaneously and effectively championed the cause of the persecuted and the down-trodden, and so generously contributed to their relief in the past, is now four and a half million dollars. The number of American Indian tribes with which contact has been established in the Western Hemisphere—an achievement in which the members of this Community have played a leading role—is now over forty-five. No less than eighteen American Indian tribes are now represented in the Bahá’í communities of that same hemisphere, mainly as a result of the assiduous endeavors exerted by the members of this Community. The number of territories, federal districts and states where official authorization for the conduct of Bahá’í marriages has been obtained is now twenty-eight, whilst the number of localities, in that same country, where the Bahá’í Holy Days are officially recognized is one short of forty.

IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

In the African continent, where the momentum gained in the process of propagation of the Faith and the consolidation of its newly-born administrative institutions has exceeded the rate of progress achieved in every other continent of the globe, and particularly since the emergence, a year ago, of three regional spiritual assemblies, the number of the adherents of the Faith, including those in the newly-opened islands off the eastern and western coasts of that vast continent, is now well over thirty-five hundred, over three thousand of whom are Negroes. The number of localities where the followers of Bahá'u'lláh reside is over five hundred and fifty. The number of tribes represented in these flourishing communities has reached one hundred and ninety-seven. The number of languages into which Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated is over seventy, whilst the number of local spiritual assemblies, constituting the bedrock of a solidly established Order, is approaching one hundred and fifty.

IN THE PACIFIC AREA

In the Pacific area, where Bahá'í exploits bid fair to outshine the feats achieved in any other ocean, and indeed in every continent of the globe, now competing for the palm of victory with the African continent itself, preliminary measures have been undertaken for the formation of no less than three of the thirteen national and regional spiritual assemblies which are to be established in the course of this year's Ridván festivities. These three assemblies, the seats of which are to be located in Japan, in Indonesia and in the Dominion of New Zealand, are destined to function in regions where the yellow, the brown and white races predominate, and in which the majority of the inhabitants belong either to the Buddhist, the Muslim or Christian Faiths. In so vast and promising an area, blessed by the labors of two Hands of the Cause of God, the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside, which in the concluding years of the Apostolic Age of the Faith, had barely reached ten, has now swelled to over two hundred and ten, scattered over no less than forty islands. It already boasts over seventeen hundred believers of the brown race alone, more than fifty local spiritual assemblies, five national Hazíratu'l-Quds, three Bahá'í schools, twenty-one incorporated local spiritual assemblies, four states where Bahá'í national endowments have been established, a site purchased for its first projected Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, three territories where the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate is recognized, and three others where Bahá'í children have been allowed to observe the Bahá'í Holy Days, as well as the translation of Bahá'í literature into no less than fifty of the languages current among its indigenous population. It, moreover, prides itself on the initiation of teaching activities in no less than a hundred of the four hundred islands constituting one of its numerous southern archipelagos.

THE MOTHER-TEMPLES OF THREE CONTINENTS

So brilliant and diversified a record of services to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, has been greatly enriched by the plans now initiated for the launching of an

ambitious three-fold enterprise, designed to compensate for the disabilities suffered by the sorely-tried Community of the followers of His Faith in the land of His birth, aiming at the erection, in localities as far apart as Frankfurt, Sydney and Kampala, of the Mother-Temples of the European, the Australian and African continents, at a cost of approximately one million dollars, complementing the Temples already constructed in the Asiatic and American continents. One-third of this sum I, gladly and with a grateful heart, pledge at this auspicious hour, a sum which, when added to the funds already donated for this laudable purpose, amounting to one hundred and forty thousand dollars—over one hundred thousand of which represents the munificent donation of the Hand of the Cause, Amelia Collins—will constitute well-nigh half of the entire amount required to ensure the consummation of this stupendous, epoch-making undertaking.

The designs for these sacred Fanés, to be raised to the glory of the Founder of our Faith, and dedicated to the worship of the one true God, have, in the case of the Australian and African Temples, been already executed by the Hand of the Cause, Mason Remey, whilst the design for the German Temple has been completed by the German architect, Teuto Rocholl—all three of which will be exhibited, for the first time, to the assembled delegates at the thirteen historic Bahá'í National Conventions being held for the first time during this year's Ridván Festival. The excavation of the foundations of the African Temple has actually commenced, whilst plans and specifications are being prepared by a well-known firm in Kampala. The construction of the Australian Temple has, moreover, been placed in the hands of a reliable Sydney architect, who will have completed the detailed drawings and specifications by the first of Ridván, and contemplates beginning work on the foundations by next June and completing the building by March, 1959.

To the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, more than a thousand in number, to groups as well as individuals, in every continent of the globe, and in whatever island they may be laboring in the service of this glorious Faith, I direct an earnest plea to arise, now that the prodigious task of the purchase of more than forty national Hazíratu'l-Quds, and the establishment of Bahá'í national

endowments in nearly fifty countries, has been triumphantly consummated and display, at this hour when the global Spiritual Crusade has just passed the third-way point, the self-same solidarity, generosity, tenacity and single-mindedness which they have consistently demonstrated since its inauguration four years ago, which have insured the success of some of the most arduous enterprises launched under the Ten-Year Plan, and which, in the decades preceding its inception, have brought to a glorious culmination the task of erecting the first two Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs of the Bahá'í world.

KNIGHTS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND HEROIC PIONEERS

A special tribute, I feel, should be paid in this survey of worldwide Bahá'í achievements, to the heroic band of pioneers, and particularly to the company of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who, as a result of their indomitable spirit, courage, steadfastness, and self-abnegation, have achieved in the course of four brief years, in so many of the virgin territories newly opened to His Faith, a measure of success far exceeding the most sanguine expectations. Such a success, reflected in both the numerical strength of these territories and the range and solidity of the achievements of the Bahá'í crusaders responsible for their opening and development, has surpassed to an unbelievable extent the goals set for them under the Ten-Year Plan.

To Uganda, opened on the eve of the Global Crusade, where the number of the avowed adherents of the Faith has now passed the eleven hundred mark, and the number of Bahá'í centres exceeds one hundred and eighty, to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and Gambia where the number of the believers has reached five hundred and three hundred respectively, must be added Mentawai Islands, where adult Bahá'ís now number over eleven hundred; the British Cameroons, with well-nigh three hundred adult Bahá'ís; Mauritius with over seventy; Basutoland with over fifty; Ruanda-Urundi and the Seychelles, each with over thirty; Spanish Morocco, Reunion Island, the French Cameroons, British Togoland, French Togoland, Sikkim, the Canary Islands, British Guiana, Cape Verde Islands, Ashanti Protectorate, Swaziland, South Rhodesia, each with over twenty; and

Key West, French Equatorial Africa, Cook Islands, Balearic Islands, French Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, Cyprus, Morocco International Zone, Samoa Islands, Mariana Islands, New Hebrides Islands, Solomon Islands, Portuguese Timor, Bechuanaland, Northern Territories Protectorate, Bahama Islands, and Brunei, each with between ten and twenty.

CONFERENCES AND INSTITUTES

Nor should reference be omitted in these pages to the surprisingly numerous conferences and institutes which, in the course of the last twelve months, have been organized by the enterprising, the indefatigable and vigilant members of Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world, supplementing the multiple activities carried on with such splendid vigor in the course of the prosecution of the Ten-Year Plan. A mere enumeration of these institutes and conferences will serve to reveal their diversity and scope, and demonstrate the earnestness with which their organizers and participants are discharging their primary obligation to propagate their Faith:

The first Southeast Asia Teaching Conference in Djakarta, Indonesia; the first All-Taiwan Teaching Conference in Tainan; the Korean Summer and Winter Conference in Kwangju; the Indo-China Teaching Conference in Saigon; the Japanese National Teaching Conference in Kyoto; the first American Indian Teaching Conference in Northern Arizona; the American Indian Teaching Conference in Los Angeles, California; the Alaskan Teaching Conference in Fairbanks; the Hawaii-wide Teaching Conference in Honolulu; the Western Canada Summer Conference in Banff; the Maritime Teaching Conference in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; the Teaching Conference in Beaulac, Canada; the French Teaching Conference in Mentone-Garavan; the third Italian Teaching Conference in Rome; the third Swiss Teaching Conference in Basel; the Teaching Conference in Romanshorn; the Teaching Conference in Neuchatel; the Iberian Teaching Conferences in Barcelona; the first Austrian Teaching Conference in Gosau; the Teaching Conference in Frankfurt; the Regional Convention in Stuttgart; the Teaching Conference in Stockholm; the Benelux Regional Teaching Conferences in Brussels and in The Hague; the Nordisk Teaching Conference in Moss, Norway; the Northwest Teaching Conferences in Liverpool, Blackpool and Manchester; the Midlands Teaching Conference in Birmingham; the Southeast Teaching Conferences in London and Reading; the Scottish Teaching Conferences in Edinburgh and Glasgow; the Northern Ireland Teaching Conference

in Belfast; the Northeast Teaching Conference in Leeds; the Southwest Teaching Conferences in Portcawl, Torquay and Cardiff; the British Northern Isles Teaching Conference in Lerwick, Shetland Islands; the South India Teaching Conference in Bangalore; the Pakistan Teaching Conference in Karachi; the South Australian State Teaching Conference in Adelaide; the New South Wales Regional Teaching Conference in Sydney; the Australian Post-Convention Teaching Institute in Sydney; the New Zealand Teaching Conference in Wellington; the New Zealand Regional Teaching Conference in New Plymouth; the Regional Teaching Conference in Hobart, Tasmania; the Canary Islands Teaching Conference in Las Palmas; the first Colombian Teaching Conference in Bogota; the Peruvian Teaching Conference in Lima; the first Mexican Teaching Conference in Mexico City; the Cuban Teaching Conference in Havana; the Haitian Teaching Conference in Port-au-Prince; the Honduran Teaching Conference in Honduras; the Guatemalan Teaching Conference in Guatemala; the Dominican Teaching Conference in Ciudad Trujillo; the Jamaican Teaching Conference in Kingston; the El Salvador Teaching Conference in Santa Ana; the Nicaraguan Teaching Conference in Managua; the Costa Rican Teaching Conference in San José; the Panamanian Teaching Conference in Panama City; the Annual Study Institute of Brazil in Rezende; the Teaching Conferences of the British Cameroons in Mutengere, as well as a large number of similar conferences and institutes too numerous to mention held throughout the United States of America.

To these highly praiseworthy accomplishments, in which an increasing number of the promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whether teachers or administrators, have shared in recent years, must be added an even more impressive list of enterprises, none of them specified as part of the Ten-Year Plan, and which stalwart upholders of His Cause, driven by an irresistible impulse to further enlarge its limits, multiply its assets, consolidate its foundations, and noise abroad its fame, have initiated and conducted at a steadily accelerated pace since the launching of the World Spiritual Crusade.

Indeed the multiplicity, variety, scope, and significance of these enterprises have impelled me to tabulate and record them for posterity on a specially prepared map, designed to present graphically the

achievements supplementing the tasks already performed in pursuance of the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan. A bare recital of these additional victories won, in such rapid succession, over so vast a field, by the band of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders, will amply demonstrate the unquenchable enthusiasm, no less than the inflexible resolve and boundless devotion, animating His followers in the pursuit of their high calling.

DYNAMIC POWER OF FAITH

The opening of the Sovereign states of Laos and of Cambodia and of the islands of Trinidad, of Corisco, of Fernando-Po, of Pemba and of Mafia; the acquisition of sites for the construction of the future Mother-Temples of Argentina, of Brazil and of Libya; the sum recently allocated for the purchase of a site for the erection of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the British Isles; the launching of the twin far-reaching enterprises designed to culminate in the establishment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs of Africa and of Australasia; the founding of Bahá'í Schools in the New Hebrides Islands, in Mentawai Islands and in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands; the establishment of Bahá'í burial grounds in Libya, Burma and Tanganyika; the formulation of supplementary plans by the newly emerged regional spiritual assemblies in Africa, and by the Bahá'í communities of the Seychelles and the Sudan; the acquisition of land for the Bahá'í summer schools of Egypt, of 'Iráq and of Chile; the establishment of Bahá'í endowments in the Aleutian Islands, in Swaziland, in Mentawai Islands, in Spanish Morocco, in Basutoland and in Liberia; the acquisition of local Hazíratu'l-Quds in Gambia, in the Aleutian Islands, in Uganda, in Spanish Morocco, in the British Cameroons, in Algeria and in French Morocco; the translation of Bahá'í literature into thirty-one African, seven American Indian, and twenty-eight miscellaneous languages; the purchase of Bahá'í historic sites in the City of Adrianople; the founding of an Indian Cultural Institute in Chichicastenango, Guatemala; the transfer of the remains of the Báb's infant son from a mosque in Shíráz to the Bahá'í burial ground in that city—these proclaim, in no uncertain terms, the splendid initiative and the dynamic power of the faith of the bearers of the Gospel of the New Day, as well as their unyielding determination to exceed, by every means in their power, the bounds of their prescribed duties and responsibilities assumed under the Ten-Year Plan, and to enhance, through every channel open to them, and over as wide a range as their circumstances permit, their share of service in the collective task now being prosecuted with such exemplary heroism, on the whole surface of the planet, for the world-wide triumph of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and the ultimate redemption of all mankind.

SOLEMN RENEWAL OF DEDICATION

Dearly-beloved friends: The opening of the second year of the third phase of a ten-year long Crusade, marking the passing of a little over one third of its duration; coinciding with the closing of a period rendered memorable by the achievement of so many of its goals, as well as by a succession of victories won in fields beyond its scope; significantly ushered in by the emergence of no less than thirteen national and regional spiritual assemblies in four continents, with a jurisdiction embracing more than forty territories of the globe, in the election of which over three hundred delegates representing more than one hundred and thirty local communities will participate; and over the inauguration of which no less than thirteen Hands of the Cause of God will preside—the opening of so auspicious a year must be signalized by a solemn renewal of dedication, on the part of all who are participating in this colossal, world-girdling enterprise, and indeed by the entire company of those who profess the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—a dedication which, as the year pursues its course, will be reflected in acts the brilliance of which will eclipse the shining exploits achieved since the inception of the Crusade, and, indeed, since the commencement of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

The preeminent task of teaching the Faith to the multitudes who consciously or unconsciously thirst after the healing Word of God in this day—a task so dear to the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; at once so sacred, so fundamental, and so urgent; primarily involving and challenging every single individual; the bed-rock on which the solidity and the stability of the multiplying institutions of a rising Order must rest—such a task must, in the course of this year, be accorded priority over every other Bahá'í activity.

“If they arise to teach My Cause,” Bahá'u'lláh Himself, revealing the secret of success for the propagation of His Faith, has declared, “they must let the breath of Him Who is the Unconstrained, stir them, and must spread it abroad on the earth with high resolve, with minds that

are wholly centred in Him, and with hearts that are completely detached from, and independent of, all things, and with souls that are sanctified from the world and its vanities. It behooveth them to choose as the best provision for their journey reliance upon God, and to clothe themselves with the love of their Lord, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious. If they do so, their words shall influence their hearers.”

TASKS FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

The historic work initiated, at the price of so much sacrifice, in more than one hundred territories of the globe, must not only be jealously safeguarded, but continually expanded, and wisely consolidated. A determined effort must be made to insure, as speedily as possible, the resettlement of the territories which Bahá'í pioneers have been forced to abandon, and the opening of the three virgin islands situated in the North Sea and in the Indian Ocean, as well as the six Republics of the Soviet Union and the five territories included within the Soviet Orbit. Particular attention should be paid to the all-important task of broadening and consolidating the foundations of the newly emerged national and regional spiritual assemblies, as an essential preliminary to the formation of additional ones designed to buttress the fabric of a steadily expanding Administrative Order. Simultaneous with the acceleration in the process of individual conversion, the equally pressing need of safeguarding local spiritual assemblies from dissolution and of increasing rapidly their number, must continually be borne in mind, as the most effectual means for the strengthening of the structural basis of the Administrative Order of the Faith. Complementing this laudable task, strenuous efforts must be exerted for the purpose of multiplying the existing groups and isolated centres in all the continents of the globe, insuring thereby the early attainment of the goal of five thousand Bahá'í centres in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. The three remaining Hazíratu'l-Quds, the last two national endowments, the one remaining Temple site, must, despite the present obstacles and the complications that have arisen, be speedily acquired, whilst the unexpected setback in the purchase of the Temple site in Frankfurt must be overcome. The important two-fold task of translating and of publishing Bahá'í literature, constituting so vital an aspect of the Plan, must be diligently pursued and rapidly completed. The construction of the Home for the Aged—an institution designed to inaugurate the Dependencies of the Mother Temple of the West—must without further delay be commenced. The process of incorporating firmly grounded local as well as newly formed national and regional spiritual assemblies must be given an unprecedented impetus in every continent of the globe. The no less

essential obligation to establish the remaining Bahá'í Publishing Trusts must likewise be discharged. Strenuous efforts must be exerted to vindicate the independent character of the Bahá'í Faith through obtaining recognition by civil authorities, in as many countries, states and localities as possible, of both the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate and the Bahá'í Holy Days. Nor should any effort be spared, however severe the challenge, to insure the acquisition and preservation for posterity of the few remaining historic sites in the Cradle of the Faith, and particularly those associated with the incarceration and execution of its Herald in Ádhirbayján. The equally meritorious project of transferring the remains of the Father of Bahá'u'lláh, of the mother and of the cousin of the Báb to the Bahá'í burial ground in the vicinity of the Most Great House, must receive the continued and prayerful attention of those on whom this sacred responsibility primarily devolves. In particular a determined effort must be made, now that no less than nine of the fifteen republics constituting the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are included within the pale of the Faith, and especially by those Bahá'í communities situated on the periphery of this vast territory, to establish a nucleus, however small, in each of the six remaining republics, all of which are now confined to the European continent, as well as in each of the two islands and of the three satellites included within the Soviet Orbit, thereby decisively contributing to the consummation of one of the most challenging objectives of this world-embracing Crusade.

Supplementing these manifold and pressing duties, which the audacious prosecutors of this vast Crusade are now, with such modest resources, and despite the smallness of their numbers, so nobly discharging, over so large a portion of the globe, and at so turbulent a stage in the affairs of mankind, is the no less vital obligation to insure through a still more spectacular demonstration of world-wide Bahá'í solidarity and self-sacrifice, the means whereby the three monumental Edifices, each designed to serve as a house for the indwelling Spirit of God and a tabernacle for the glorification of His appointed Messenger in this day, may, without any interruption, be raised and dedicated, in the European, the African and Australian continents, and contribute their share to the world-wide celebrations of the Centenary towards which every Bahá'í heart is eagerly straining.

Great are the strides that have already been made, and phenomenal the success achieved, by the prosecutors of a thrice blessed Crusade—a Crusade so closely associated with the epoch-making Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan, utilizing as its agencies the laboriously erected institutions of an efficiently functioning, divinely-appointed Administrative Order, and linking, as it forges ahead, two historic centenaries commemorating the Birth and the Declaration of the Mission of the Founder of our Faith. The tasks that still remain to be accomplished, however, are truly formidable. Above all, the homefront, that must serve as a base, and act as a reservoir for the supply of a steady flow of pioneers and resources for the multiple organized operations of a continually expanding Crusade, and which, alas, in several countries, distinguished by an outstanding record of service to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has been progressively declining, must, at whatever cost, and within as short a time as possible, be revitalized, extended and consolidated. More than ever its manpower must rapidly increase, the administrative machinery it utilizes, and on which it relies, for the effectual discharge of its Mission, must be assiduously perfected, and, most important of all, its spiritual driving force must be constantly reinforced through a firmer grasp by the individuals, ultimately responsible for its progress, of the distinguishing verities and fundamental purposes of their Faith, through a fuller dedication to its glorious Mission, and through a closer communion with its animating Spirit.

THE GUARDIAN’S APPEAL TO ALL BAHÁ’ÍS

I appeal, as I close this review of the superb feats already accomplished, in the course of so many campaigns, by the heroic band of the warriors of Bahá’u’lláh, battling in His Name and by His aid for the purification, the unification and the spiritualization of a morally and spiritually bankrupt society, now hovering on the brink of self-destruction, for a renewed dedication, at this critical hour in the fortunes of mankind, on the part of the entire company of my spiritual brethren in every continent of the globe, to the high ideals of the Cause they have espoused, as well as to the immediate accomplishment of the goals of the Crusade on which they have embarked, be they in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor, whether veteran or newly enrolled—a

dedication reminiscent of the pledges which the Dawn-breakers of an earlier Apostolic Age, assembled in conference at Badasht, and faced with issues of a different but equally challenging nature, willingly and solemnly made for the prosecution of the collective task with which they were confronted.

May this Crusade, on which the privileged heirs and present successors of the heroes of the Primitive Age of our Faith have so auspiciously embarked, yield, as it speeds on to its mid-way point, such a harvest as will amaze its prosecutors, astonish the world at large, and draw forth from the Source on high a measure of celestial strength adequate to insure its triumphant consummation.

—Shoghi

[April, 1957]

PART II

THE MINISTRY OF THE CUSTODIANS

April 1958

To Annual Bahá'í Conventions

Dearly Beloved Friends:

Riḍván is the most joyful period of the Bahá'í year. It is not only the Spring period of the world, but commemorates that Divine Springtide when ninety-five years ago the Supreme Manifestation of God revealed Himself in Baghdad and gave the promise of that Message which is destined to unite all peoples in universal peace and to enable them to live an existence ordered by Divine Law. It was particularly at this time every year that the thoughts and hearts of the believers turned to Haifa in loving anticipation of the beloved Guardian's Convention Message, of the news of the progress of the Faith the world over which he would send to them, and the inspiration, encouragement and guidance his words would bring them. How great is the shadow of his absence upon our hearts now! It would be hard to say whether you, gathered in so many far corners of the planet feel it more keenly or we, the handful of his servants at the World Centre, where every tree and pebble and flower reminds us that he has ascended to the Paradise of Bahá'u'lláh and been gathered to the glory of his Divine Forebears.

Many times during the last few years the beloved Guardian stated that while the Bahá'ís the world over were carrying out the provisions of the Divine Plan revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the activities of the present World Crusade, the Supreme Plan of God Himself was also being worked out, and that a point might come when these two Plans met and that perhaps the Plan of God would intervene in the events of

the Lesser Plan. May not his sudden passing be seen as the fulfilment of his words? Bahá'u'lláh's Own hand has been stretched forth, the Designer has altered the design but the pattern remains in its strength and glory. Every single believer must, during the past six months, have been aware of how mighty is the stronghold of our Faith, how impregnable the walls our Guardian raised about it during the last thirty-six years in the form of the tightly-woven, divinely-ordained Administrative Order which has suffered no rupture because of the sudden cataclysm of his passing and which remains not only our fortress, built by the Word of God, but the refuge for all mankind in the days to come. The Hands of the Faith at the World Centre, however, have been in a position to witness to a unique degree how true this is. Greater than any praise which can ever be laid at our Guardian's door or any monument that will ever be built in his honour, is this testimony to his achievements as reflected in the spirit shown by the Bahá'ís in East and West, whether old or new, their faithfulness to his wishes, their universal whole-hearted determination to carry out his plans, his hopes, his aims. A mighty wave of poignant love has swept all hearts, drawing the believers closer, uniting them in purpose, spurring them on to far greater dedication, sacrifice and service in the path of God—that crimson-stained path in which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were immolated, in which twenty thousand souls laid down their lives and which has now received a deeper hue through the last great sacrifice, Shoghi Effendi's own precious life.

During the Conventions presently being held, the delegates, the outgoing and incoming National Spiritual Assemblies, and all the believers have a unique opportunity to concentrate their attention on the objectives of the Ten Year Plan, as they affect their area of the globe, to contemplate the as yet unfulfilled goals, to deliberate and make suggestions on ways and means of speedily attaining them, to both pledge and raise the sums of money required for the important, urgent and arduous tasks of the coming year, to give their hearts anew to the work of God—hearts freshly purged of the dross of self through their universal grief—to arise and fulfil the soul-stirring plea of the Master, so often quoted by Shoghi Effendi *“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.” Let them remember that, as our Guardian said, heroic souls have already, since the beginning of this Crusade, “either quaffed the cup of martyrdom, or laid down their lives, or been subjected to divers ordeals while combating for its Cause”, and let them determine to do likewise, while there is yet time, and win the crown of immortal glory promised to all those who arise in the name of Bahá’u’lláh, to spread His Faith.

After the sudden and soul-shattering news of the passing of our dearly loved Guardian, hearts stood still all over the world—what did the future hold? Then came the realization on the part of the friends that in his very last message, published on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Holy Year, the Guardian had left an instrument and given instructions by which his work could be carried on, the Crusade safely prosecuted to the end, the Cause of God protected and the Design of Bahá’u’lláh, as embodied in His Most Holy Book, executed. The details of the World Crusade, like a precious golden talisman, lie in our palm. The instrument for carrying the Faith through this difficult period—perhaps to be the darkest in its history—has been reinforced, and its functions amplified through the references made to the Hands of the Faith as the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth”, through the appointment of eight more Hands scattered all over the globe, and through the addition of new Auxiliary Boards whose sole function is to protect the Cause of God.

Twenty-six of the twenty-seven Hands of the Faith gathered in Bahá’u’lláh’s Mansion at Bahjí and for one week, alone, in exhaustive hours of prayer, soul-searching and consultation, sought guidance for the immediate future. The conclusions unanimously born as a result of this agony and purging of heart were embodied in the Proclamation issued by the Hands. This document did not attempt to answer “why?”. Who can answer that question until another Manifestation of God appears? It did answer “how?”. It created a method which, with the cooperation of the believers, will ensure that the next stage in the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as amplified and outlined by our Guardian in the provisions of the World Crusade, is carried out fully and successfully, paving the way for the election of

that supreme Universal House of Justice whose deliberations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in His Will and Testament, are under the infallible guidance of God.

Realizing that the administrative and spiritual heart of our Faith is forever fixed in the Holy Land according to the explicit text of our Teachings, the Hands felt the most urgent need was to protect this perfectly functioning heart, which the Guardian had for so many years and at such great cost to himself, built up and consolidated, and which is the centre from which the world-wide administrative functions of the Cause of God must be coordinated and maintained, and into which the reports, news and statistics of the Faith must be poured, if its international character is to be preserved. They therefore unanimously appointed nine of their members to serve in Haifa. These nine were given, as a purely legal measure in order to protect the Faith, the title of “Custodians”.

The friends can imagine, remembering their own state of grief and the sudden feeling of immense moral responsibility to their Faith which swept over them on hearing of the passing of their Guardian, what a burden has fallen on those Hands who serve here at the World Centre. But, even as the sun rises after the darkest night, so have emerged the clear evidences of the unfailing protection of Bahá’u’lláh vouchsafed to His broken-hearted servants. A great wave of sincere, shocked and deep-felt sympathy poured out to the Bahá’í Community from the officials of the State of Israel and its peoples; from the President, Prime Minister and cabinet members down to the simplest citizens, tributes and condolences poured in; at every point the Government of this State has responded to our requests, and cooperated with us in protecting the interests of the Faith at the International Centre. In different parts of the world, including the Cradle of the Faith, victory after victory has been won, raising hope and confidence in our crushed hearts, assuring us that our Guardian has not abandoned us or his own glorious work even though physically he is removed from our presence.

Like an athlete trained to meet the supreme test, the administrative institutions of the Faith, raised up and consolidated by the Guardian,

responded to the appeal of the Hands, and with strength and assurance rallied to the support of the Administrative and Spiritual Heart of the Cause in its hour of danger by placing in the hands of the Custodians those documents needed to protect the institutions, properties and privileges possessed by the Bahá'í World Community at its World Centre. So strong has been the demonstration of unity on the part of the believers and their national representatives that no challenge to the actions taken or the decisions reached by the Hands has been made by the Covenant-breakers or other enemies of the Faith.

We now share with you the very encouraging and indeed thrilling news of the unfoldment of the World Crusade, on which, in the words of our Guardian, “the army of the Lord of Hosts has so joyously and confidently embarked”. The friends should realize that the main portion of the statistics in this message come from him, as he had assiduously kept the record of the progress being made in various fields up until two days before his passing. It was with the help of exhaustive lists he kept that we were able to assemble and add to the facts, brought up to date by him until the beginning of November, and thus give the believers the truly heartening picture of the steady, irresistible advance of our Faith all over the world. Many supplementary achievements of an outstanding nature have been added since his spirit was freed from the heavy bondage of his earthly life, eloquent witness of the immense love of the believers for that unique and priceless being the beloved Master left in their midst for thirty-six years.

The news of the World Centre, most of which is gleaned from notes prepared by Shoghi Effendi himself for his Annual Convention Message, is most inspiring. After more than sixty-five years of uninterrupted tenure of buildings adjacent to the Holy Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh, the Haram-i-Aqdas was at last purged of the remaining handful of Covenant-breakers in August, 1957, following the expropriation of their properties by the Israel Government. In accordance with the wishes of the beloved Guardian, these buildings were razed, and by the end of December no trace was left. The beautiful white Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh stood forth at last in all its symmetry, unsullied—the very building seemed to shine and breathe in

a new peace. The gardens, as planned by the Guardian himself, have been and are still being enlarged in the area left open by the destruction of these buildings, and a third terrace, as planned by him, has been raised towards the east so that a magnificent view is obtained of the Holy Shrine, the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh, and the great arc of gardens created by him during the last few years. Moreover, the title deeds to all the Bahjí property expropriated by the Israel Government have been safely registered in the name of the Faith. Negotiations are being completed for extra plots of land towards the north and south of the present area of Bahjí owned by the Bahá'ís in order to protect the approaches to the Most Holy Tomb and the entrance to the building used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the days after the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

In Haifa, the International Archives building is now entirely completed inside as well as out; the tall, stained glass window in its western wall, the smaller windows and the ornamental balustrade of its balconies, were built before the passing of the beloved Guardian; the green tiles and six crystal chandeliers he ordered have since been placed in position; and the municipal authorities have granted tax exemption to this first of the international institutions of the Faith to be erected on Mt. Carmel in accordance with the promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "Erelong will God sail His Ark upon thee". The gate which the beloved Guardian had ordered for the entrance to the "arc" around which the administrative institutions of the World Order are to cluster in the future, and which leads to the International Archives building, is now nearing completion. Since last Ridván three additional Israel Branches of various National Spiritual Assemblies have been added to those previously registered here and entitled to hold property, namely, those of Pakistan, Alaska and New Zealand. During the past year an unprecedented number of visitors have been received on the Bahá'í properties open to the public, and during the recent Passover Holiday, nearly eight thousand persons visited the Shrine of the Báb more than eighteen hundred in one day.

The glad tidings of the progress our world-redeeming Faith has made during the past year in all parts of the globe is truly impressive, and comprises not only victories won before the passing of our most beloved Guardian and under his direct supervision, but others,

equally impressive, won since his departure from our midst and bearing eloquent testimony to the inspiration of his spirit, to his watchful guidance from on High, and to the fact that his loving spirit is leading us on to do his work as he would wish it done.

Two of the great rallying points provided for by the Guardian in his last message to the Bahá'í world—namely, the five Intercontinental Conferences—have been held with outstanding success, and a great outpouring of spiritual bounty has undoubtedly been vouchsafed to all the believers, not only those who attended them, but also those who felt the impact of their spirit. The African Conference, at which were present more than four hundred and fifty African believers and an equal number of Persian believers and other visitors from abroad, witnessed the extraordinary feat of the raising of almost a third of a million dollars for the work in that continent, so loved by our Guardian, whilst the Australian Conference, which was attended by believers representing eighteen countries, witnessed an outpouring of more than thirty thousand Australian pounds for the Mother Temple of that continent.

Still another pillar of the Universal House of Justice is being reared in the current Ridván period in France, the first European country to receive the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, bringing the total number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies to thrice nine, and fulfilling one of the most cherished plans of the Guardian.

The number of territories included within the world community of the Most Great Name has now been raised to two hundred and fifty-four. Of all the one hundred and thirty-one new territories listed by our beloved Guardian in the Ten Year Plan, only Spitzbergen and eleven areas included in the Soviet orbit remain unopened, as a result of the settlement, during the past year, of the Chagos Archipelago by the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Pouva Murday, and the opening of Nicobar Island by the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Mrs. Bates and her daughter Jeanne Frankel.

The constant multiplication of localities where Bahá'ís reside in all parts of the globe has raised the total number of such centres to over forty-five hundred, an increase of thirteen hundred in the last three years. Of these localities—termed by our Guardian foci of the warming and healing light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh—nearly one hundred and twenty are now established in the Goal Countries of Europe, nearly one hundred and thirty in the British Isles, over one hundred and thirty-five in Germany and Austria, one hundred and forty in Australasia, one hundred and forty-five in the Dominion of Canada, one hundred and sixty in the Indian subcontinent, one hundred and ninety in Latin America, nearly two hundred and eighty in the entire Pacific area, over seven hundred in the African continent, over ten hundred and fifty in Persia, and over fourteen hundred and sixty in the United States.

The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies established in all parts of the globe, constituting in the beloved Guardian's own words "the broad and indestructible foundation of the edifice of a rising Order", is now almost eleven hundred, an increase of nearly a hundred in one year. The total number of incorporated Spiritual Assemblies, both local and national, is now two hundred and sixteen, an increase of more than twenty during the past year, including several of the thirteen National Assemblies newly established in the Ridván period of 1957.

The literature of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has now been translated into two hundred and forty-four languages, of which one hundred and fifty-five have been completed since the beginning of the Crusade. No less than seventy-eight of these represent supplementary achievements above those called for in the Ten Year Plan.

Of the forty-nine National Hazíratu'l-Quds enumerated as Crusade objectives, forty-eight have been acquired, leaving only the headquarters in Caracas, Venezuela still to be established. Of the fifty-one national Bahá'í endowments to be purchased during the Ten Year Crusade, fifty have now been established, leaving only one more to be acquired.

The number of countries and states, as well as cities in the United States, where the educational authorities have recognized the Bahá'í Holy Days is now nearly sixty, an increase of more than ten in the past year, including the entire country of Uganda.

The number of sovereign states and dependencies as well as territories, federal districts and states of the United States of America, where the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate is recognized is now forty, special legislation having been passed by the Legislature of Texas in the United States, permitting Bahá'í marriages to be legally performed in that State, and more recently, and of great significance in hastening the day when the independence of our beloved Faith will have been fully vindicated, is the pronouncement by a religious judge in the Sudan that as the Bahá'í Faith is an independent religion, two Bahá'ís of Islamic extraction should not be registered as Muslims but married as Bahá'ís and the historic registration in the Republic of San Marino of the first Bahá'í marriage ever performed there, an event without precedence in the European continent.

Of the utmost significance, not only in the Ten Year Plan, but for future decades and centuries of the Bahá'í Era, is the striking progress made in acquiring the sites for future Mashriqu'l-Adhikár. The execution, in March of this year, of the contract for purchase of the Temple site in Stockholm completes the list of eleven such sites originally enumerated by the beloved Guardian as Crusade objectives. To this imposing list have been added no less than nine other sites acquired in such widely scattered areas of the globe as Alaska, Indonesia, Libya, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil, Liberia, the British Isles, and Switzerland, that of Switzerland having the unique distinction of being the only Temple site ever purchased by the Guardian of the Faith himself, in the particular situation in Bern which he himself prescribed, overlooking the Alps. Many of these sites represent victories achieved in the subsidiary Six Year Plans given by our Guardian to the various new National and Regional Assemblies formed in the Ridván period a year ago.

In the African continent, where the unparalleled progress of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in recent years brought such joy to the beloved

Guardian, the number of believers is now well over the five thousand mark, an increase of nearly two thousand in the past year, the vast majority of which are of the Negro race. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in that flourishing area is now approaching the two hundred mark and may well reach or exceed this level in the current Riḍván period. A total of two hundred and three African tribes are now represented in the Bahá'í world community, an increase of one hundred and ninety-three since the inception of the Crusade. Land for a Bahá'í school in Uganda has been offered by one of the African members of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of that area, a contribution to the Faith which made the Guardian particularly happy. In the Pacific area, that vast territory where the rapid spread of the Faith and the development of its institutions is, in the words of our Guardian, "competing for the palm of victory with the African continent itself", the evidences of new victories won continue to multiply. The number of believers has now passed the three thousand mark, the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside has reached the imposing total of two hundred and eighty, and the number of indigenous languages into which Bahá'í literature has been translated is now well over fifty. Other significant evidences of the progressive increase of Bahá'í institutions in that area are the establishment of twenty-seven incorporated Spiritual Assemblies, the establishment of independent Bahá'í burial grounds in Indonesia and Malaya, and the founding of three additional Bahá'í schools, doubling the number already existing, as well as the pending completion of construction of still another.

In the far-flung reaches of the Western Hemisphere, the total number of localities within the Community of the Most Great Name is now nearly eighteen hundred. The area is now served by seven National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies, and over three hundred Local Assemblies, of which over one hundred and thirty are incorporated. The number of American Indian tribes with which contact has been established now exceeds fifty, nearly twenty-five of which are now represented in the Faith. The first all-Indian Local Spiritual Assembly in South America has been formed in Huanuni, Bolivia. The many notable victories recorded during the past year in widely scattered areas of this vast hemisphere are far too numerous to summarize here, but the following may be mentioned to illustrate the range and diversity of these accomplishments: The formation of a group in the

Arctic Village of Barrow; the granting to the Canadian National Assembly of tax exemption for the Maxwell House in Montreal as a result of a finding by the Superior Court that the Faith is an independent religion entitled to such exemption; the beginning of construction of the Home for the Aged, the first Dependency of the Mother Temple of the West, and the action by the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Wilmette Village Trustees in effect upholding the firm Bahá'í position on the oneness of mankind taken by the elected national representatives of the American Bahá'í Community responsible for this important project; the holding of the first Bahá'í Summer School of Central America; and the establishment of a Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Although no doubt incomplete, we cannot refrain from sharing with the friends the list of teaching conferences and congresses which our beloved Guardian had so patiently, and meticulously, and at so much cost of effort to his precious self, assembled in preparation for his Convention Message. First and foremost must be mentioned the conferences held by the Hands of the Faith and their Auxiliary Board members at Bex les Bains, and in Bern, Switzerland, and those called since the passing of the Guardian and held in over forty places in the United States of America. The Teaching Conferences held in Bex les Bains, Switzerland; Sanary sur Mer, France; Darby Hall, England; Belgium India; Rome, Italy; Panama, Canal Zone; that of the Maritimes, held in St. John, New Brunswick; and of Lower Burma, held in Rangoon; as well as the Teaching Conferences of Pakistan; of Benelux, held in Luxembourg Ville, Luxembourg; those of Alaska, held in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Ketchikan; the Regional Teaching Conferences held in areas so widely separated as Sydney, New South Wales; Queensland, Victoria; Adelaide, South Australia; and Tasmania; Northern Bavaria, convened in Nuremberg; and that of Regina, Saskatchewan; the National Teaching Conferences held in Frankfurt, Germany, St. Croix and Lucerne, Switzerland; the Bi-Area Teaching Conference held in Green Acre, Eliot, Maine; the Summer Conference held in Banff, Alberta for Western Canada; the Regional Teaching Congresses held in Curitiba, Brazil; Asunción, Paraguay; and in Panama, representative also of other Central American Republics; the historic All Greece Teaching Conference held after the passing of the Guardian, and the Inter-Community Conference series held in Vancouver, British Columbia.

As the world-encircling Crusade passes its crucial midway point, the significance of which was outlined in such inspiring terms by the beloved Guardian himself in his last message to the Bahá'í world, and which has been thrown into such brilliant relief by the white glare of his ascension, we must all assess the tasks that lie ahead of us with clear minds and with courage and determination in our hearts. He himself pointed out to us that until this midway point was reached we had traversed three phases of our Ten Year Plan. The first phase, from 1953 to 1954, witnessed the unique feat of the addition of over one hundred countries to the roll of those opened to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh; the second phase, 1954 to 1956, was signalized by the purchase of the vast majority of the forty-nine National Hazíratu'l-Quds, and the fifty-one national endowments constituting goals of the World Crusade; the third phase, 1956 to 1958, was distinguished by the addition of almost 1,000 centres and sixteen new National and Regional Assemblies. The fourth phase, as our beloved Guardian pointed out in his October message to the Bahá'í world, "must be immortalized, on the one hand, by an unprecedented increase in the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith, in all the continents of the globe, of every race, clime, creed and colour, and from every stratum of present-day society, coupled with a corresponding increase in the number of Bahá'í centres and, on the other, by a swift progress in the erection of the Mother Temples of Africa, and Australia, as well as by the initiation of the construction of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Europe."

Already, at the two great Intercontinental Conferences held in Kampala and Sydney, substantial contributions to these three Temples have been made, but the needs of these infinitely precious and spiritually significant Houses of Worship—Temples whose designs were either chosen or approved by the Guardian himself, and to which he made the gift of Sacred Dust from the inmost Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh—are far from being met, and a sustained and self-sacrificing effort will be required on the part of the World Bahá'í Community to complete them.

In checking over the outline which the Guardian himself had been preparing in anticipation of his 1958 Ridván Message to the Bahá'í world it was found that in addition to the above-quoted tasks which

constitute in his own words the fourth phase of the crusade—a phase which must now carry it to its consummation—he had noted that three new National Spiritual Assemblies were to be formed in Rıdván 1959, namely, those of Burma, Turkey and Austria, and one regional one, that of the South Pacific. We cannot refrain from complimenting the believers in these areas on the progress they have made and the spirit they have shown which attracted to them, just before his passing, the loving good-pleasure of their Guardian and presented them with such a unique opportunity to distinguish themselves in the service of the Faith.

Whilst we cannot but view with feelings of awe, pride and profound thanksgiving the extraordinary victories won during the last five years, it is certainly incumbent upon us at this time to bear in mind that only half of the Crusade has run its course, that our way through the world is harder and stonier than before, and that tremendous tasks still lie ahead. Let us recall the words of the beloved Guardian himself:

“The newly opened territories of the globe must, under no circumstances, be allowed to relapse into the state of spiritual deprivation from which they have so recently and laboriously been rescued. Nay, the highly edifying evidences proclaiming the expansion and the consolidation of the superb historic work achieved in so many of these territories must be rapidly multiplied. The Local Assemblies that have been so diligently and patiently established must under no circumstances be allowed to dissolve, or their foundations be in any way endangered. The mighty and steady process involving the increase in the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith, and the multiplication of isolated centres groups and Local Assemblies must, throughout this newly opened phase of the Plan, be markedly accelerated.”

And, finally, we ask each and every believer to ponder in his heart the solemn charge laid upon us by our Beloved when he was preparing us to shoulder the tasks of the Holy Crusade: “. . . I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme,

the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet—I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective . . . has been fully consummated.”

HANDS OF THE CAUSE IN THE HOLY LAND

April 1959

Dearly beloved Friends:

The most glorious Feast of the Bahá'í Year, the "*King of Festivals*", the Ridván commemoration of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, "*Whose Day every Prophet hath announced*" and for Whose advent "*the soul of every Divine Messenger hath thirsted*", is once more upon us, the second Ridván since the passing of our precious, our most beloved Guardian. No report from the World Centre can ever take the place of the wonderful stream of inspiring words he poured out in his great messages to us at this period, when so many of the believers gather together at the Annual Bahá'í Conventions, and which conveyed to us not only the soul-stirring news of the progress the Faith had made during the past year, but called us to new heights of service, rallied our spirits and refreshed our souls with his own great vision of the future. Much as we long for his presence, his words, his inspiration, his loving care, we must realize that what has been given to us no man can take away. What Shoghi Effendi showered on us for thirty-six years of his Guardianship, what he built into the Faith and into its followers' hearts all over the world, is a permanent creation and one that has become on the one hand a part of history, and on the other a part of our personal lives. We must show our gratitude to him in a mighty renewal of deeds. We must rejoice over the continuing evidences of the never-failing grace of Bahá'u'lláh which carries the work of His Faith forward in spite of every test, trial and crisis.

This past year has witnessed the steady onward march of the Cause of God in every field. When we recall how grievous and shattering was the blow we received in November, 1957, we cannot but marvel at the evidences, so clear for friend or enemy to behold, of the indomitable strength of this Cause which the Guardian knit so firmly

together, and the foundations of whose Administrative Order he laid so securely during his lifetime that the earthquake of his passing neither shattered the unity nor shook the confidence of the Community of the followers of the Most Great Name. Let us bow our heads humbly in gratitude to the Author of our Faith for His protection and manifold mercies showered upon us during these days of supreme test and suffering.

The monument erected on the grave of the beloved Guardian was completed just two days before the anniversary of his passing; the gleaming pillar of pure white Carrara marble, resting on a base of three steps and surmounted by a Corinthian capital bearing a globe of the world, all of the same stone, rose up against the grey autumn skies of London, in its simplicity and beauty a befitting memorial to that great being who himself created so much beauty on the slopes of Mt. Carmel and around the Holiest Spot on this planet, the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh. Perched, as if about to take off in flight, or just settling from the skies, a gilded bronze eagle, the emblem of so many victories, crowns the monument. A dignified white stone balustrade, surmounted at the four corners by ornate stone urns, encloses the inner garden where the grave lies; adjoining this sanctuary, and constituting its approach, is a second larger garden surrounded by a red brick wall; a red path stretches from the two white steps leading down from the inner garden straight to the beautiful gilded wrought iron gates at the bottom of the second garden-which constitute the main entrance to the Guardian's resting-place. On either side of these gates two cypress trees, reminiscent of the hundreds of cypress trees the Guardian himself planted in the Shrine gardens at the World Centre of the Faith, stand guard. Two lovely weeping holly trees, two white pedestals with white Carrara marble vases planted with flowers, decorate the grounds as one approaches, through this outer garden, that sacred spot where the Beloved of our hearts is laid to rest. Many hundreds of Bahá'ís have already made a pilgrimage to this shrine. Many hundreds of non-Bahá'ís have likewise visited it, drawn by the powerful spirit they feel there, attracted by what they see in the faces of the believers who come there to pray, and by the abundance of radiant flowers which constantly surround the foot of the monument.

The tribute of the believers has been completed outwardly, but the mighty, invisible tribute to his memory continues to be built. The friends will recall that when they were invited to contribute to the Memorial Fund for the erection of this monument, the Hands of the Faith stated that any sum received above that required to construct the monument itself and embellish its precincts would be spent to carry on the teaching work and erect the Temples he specified should be constructed during the Crusade. Sums have been received from the believers all over the world, and now that this blessed grave has been befittingly completed, we could think of no work dearer to Shoghi Effendi's heart at this time than that of the new teaching campaigns being launched in Africa, and aimed at that mass conversion he said in his last message to the Bahá'í world, should be undertaken as part of the work of the remaining five years of the Ten Year Plan. The first expenditure from this Memorial Fund was therefore made to assist some of the Regional African Assemblies in launching an intensive teaching campaign in those areas most receptive to the Faith; many of the African teachers are now travelling amongst their own people, financed from this Fund. What better memorial to Shoghi Effendi can be erected, now that his physical resting-place has been suitably completed, than this mighty spiritual one which will endure in the hearts of men and will help lay the foundation of the Kingdom of God in such distant and promising lands?

Aware of how eager the friends are to receive from the World Centre a report of the progress the Faith has made during the past year and the status of the beloved Guardian's world-girdling Crusade, we are happy to share with the believers attending the thirty-one Annual Bahá'í Conventions now being held in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Australasia, Europe and the Pacific region the following truly inspiring news, which testifies so eloquently to the greatness and the enduring quality of the work Shoghi Effendi achieved during his lifetime, and over which, we firmly believe, he constantly and lovingly watches from on High.

The number of countries, islands and dependencies where the Standard of Bahá'u'lláh has been unfurled now totals two hundred and fifty-five, as a result of the settlement during the past year of a pioneer in Spitzbergen the one remaining virgin goal outside the

Soviet orbit. This feat, achieved by the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Paul Adams, brings the total number of new territories opened to the Faith since the inception of the Ten Year Plan to one hundred and twenty-seven.

At the end of the sixth year of the Crusade the number of localities included within the pale of the Faith has reached the impressive total of over five thousand two hundred, fulfilling the wish of Shoghi Effendi expressed in his last Ridván Message that “. . . strenuous efforts must be exerted for the purpose of multiplying the existing groups and isolated centres in all the continents of the globe, ensuring thereby the early attainment of the goal of five thousand Bahá'í centres in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.” Such a signal achievement represents an increase of almost seven hundred centres since his passing, centres referred to by him as pivots of Bahá'í teaching and administrative activity, and which have more than doubled since the launching of the World Crusade in 1953. This truly remarkable reflection of the victories won under the divinely-guided leadership of our Guardian has brought the number of such centres in the Goal Countries of Europe to over a hundred and twenty, in Germany and Austria to a hundred and thirty-five, in Australasia and in Canada, respectively, to nearly a hundred and forty-five, in the British Isles to nearly a hundred and fifty, in the Indian sub-continent to almost a hundred and seventy, in Latin America to nearly two hundred and forty, in the entire Pacific area to over four hundred and fifty, in the African continent to nearly nine hundred and fifty, in Persia to more than one thousand and fifty, and in the United States of America to more than one thousand five hundred.

The most striking increases during the past year, and indeed since the ascension of the beloved Guardian, have occurred in Africa and in the widely dispersed countries and islands of the Pacific-the two areas whose competition for “the palm of victory” brought such happiness to his heart in the last years and months of his precious life.

The formation during the current Ridván period of the new National Spiritual Assemblies of Austria, Burma, and Turkey, and the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific, as

specified by the beloved Guardian himself, brings the total of these forerunners and future pillars of the Universal House of Justice to thirty-one, sixteen of-which are now incorporated, four having achieved this status during the past year. The total number of Local Spiritual Assemblies established throughout the world, and constituting, in the words of our Guardian, “the foundation of a rising Administrative Order”, is now nearly twelve hundred and seventy-five, almost two hundred more than the number reported in last year’s Convention Message. Over two hundred of these are now incorporated. Included in the substantial number of recent new registrations is that of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Port Victoria, Seychelles Islands, as a result of an enactment by the Legislative Council, and the approval of the Articles of Incorporation of the Local Assembly of Nuku’Alofa, Tonga Islands, representing significant victories won in important islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, respectively.

The number of languages into which Bahá’í literature has been translated now totals two hundred and sixty-one, an increase of one hundred and seventy-two in six years, over ninety of which represent supplementary languages added since the inception of the Crusade.

The acquisition of the Hazíratu’l-Quds in Caracas, Venezuela, and the endowment in Brussels, Belgium during the past year completes the list of such properties originally specified as goals of the Ten Year Crusade. In addition to these, located in the capitals and chief cities which are or will be the seats of the National and Regional Assemblies to be established by 1963, a significant number of Hazíratu’l-Quds have been acquired in recent years as supplementary goals in such widely scattered and important cities as Apia, Samoa; Osaka and Amagasaki, Japan; Callao, Peru; Kuching, Sarawak; Algiers, Algeria; Rabat, French Morocco; Larache, Spanish Morocco; Bathurst, Gambia; Victoria, British Cameroons; Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia; Rembang, Indonesia; Solano, Philippine Islands; and six in Viet Nam, including Saigon and Tourane. A number of supplementary endowments and sites for future Hazíratu’l-Quds have also been acquired, including properties in Morocco, the Canary Islands, Liberia, Basutoland, the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Malaya, the Philippines, and Brazil.

Although not specified as goals of the Ten Year Plan, the establishment of separate Bahá'í burial grounds has given increasing emphasis to the independent status of the Faith and added to its prestige in the many different places where such properties have been acquired in recent years, such as Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika; Nairobi, Kenya; Kampala, Uganda; Rabat and Meknes, French Morocco; Tripoli, Libya; Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia; Khartoum North, in the Sudan; Djakarta, Indonesia; Singapore, Malaya; and Ashiya, Japan.

The independent character of the Faith is further attested by the growing number of countries, states, provinces and other governmental subdivisions where the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate is recognized. Such recognition has now been granted in over forty different jurisdictions throughout the five continents, the most recent being Poona, in Bombay State, India, and the Province of British Columbia in Canada. The Bahá'í Holy Days have been recognized by the educational authorities in nearly seventy countries, states or provinces, and cities. Noteworthy during the past year has been the achievement of such recognition throughout Japan, as a result of the inclusion of such a provision in the document incorporating the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia.

The original Crusade goal calling for the acquisition of eleven Temple sites was fulfilled more than a year ago, with the purchase of the site of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár Stockholm. In anticipation of the day when Bahá'í Houses of Worship will be built, not only in every continent, but in many different countries, the beloved Guardian included the purchase of additional Temple sites in the subsidiary Plans which he assigned to the new National and Regional Assemblies formed since 1953. Seventeen of these supplementary sites have now been acquired throughout the world, eight during the past year, in Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay in Latin America; New Zealand in the Antipodes; and in Tunisia on the northern fringe of the African continent.

The steady consolidation and expansion of the Faith in the Pacific area and in Africa continues to furnish striking evidence that the rapid

spiritual awakening which began in those regions in the last years of the blessed Guardian's life is continuing.

In the countries and islands under the jurisdiction of the four Regional National Assemblies of Africa, the number of declared believers is approaching nine thousand. This area now has almost three hundred Local Spiritual Assemblies, with a substantial increase assured during the current Ridván period. Two hundred and forty-three African tribes are now represented in the Bahá'í Community, an increase of forty-three during the past year. In Central and East Africa, the total number of believers has more than quadrupled in the three years since the formation of the Regional Assembly in 1956. In North West Africa, a gain of fifty percent has occurred since Ridván 1957. In the British Cameroons alone over seven hundred new Bahá'ís have been enrolled since the ascension of the beloved Guardian. In the southern part of the continent, in Swaziland, The Paramount Chief's Council, the legislative body for the Swazi nation, has recognized the Bahá'í Faith as one of the religions that can be taught in that country, and one of the prominent tribal chiefs has encouraged the teaching of the Faith amongst his people.

In the Pacific, exclusive of Australasia, the area where the beloved Guardian said that "Bahá'í exploits bid fair to outshine the feats achieved in any other ocean, and indeed in every continent of the globe", the number of centres has now risen to well over three hundred, seventy-four of which constitute Local Spiritual Assemblies. The ranks of the believers in the Mentawai Islands alone have swelled to more than three thousand; in all of Indonesia, including Mentawai, the number of declared Bahá'ís has more than trebled since Ridván 1957; and in Viet Nam the rate of gain has been even more striking. a seventh Bahá'í School has been opened in Mentawai, and two more schools have been established in Viet Nam in the past year. The extraordinary progress the Faith has made throughout the highly promising Pacific region has been markedly reinforced by the translation of Bahá'í literature into nearly seventy-five indigenous languages.

Throughout the Western Hemisphere, the Community of the Most Great Name now comprises over nineteen hundred Bahá'í centres. In Central and South America and the neighbouring islands, where a total of twenty new National Spiritual Assemblies must be formed before 1963, there are nearly two hundred and forty centres, sixty-five of which have their own Local Spiritual Assemblies. Since the beginning of the World Crusade, contact has been established with nearly sixty Indian tribes in North, Central and South America, of which nearly thirty are now represented in the Faith. The steady advancement in this field, to which the beloved Guardian attached so much importance, is evinced by the formation of the second all-Indian Local Spiritual Assembly in South America last Ridván in Vilcollo, Bolivia. Among many other evidences of the expansion of Bahá'í institutions throughout the Americas during the past year may be mentioned the inauguration of the first Summer School in Alaska; the beginning of active publication by the newly-established Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Buenos Aires; the first dependency of the Mother Temple of the West, the Bahá'í Home for the Aged, was officially opened a few months ago, an event of undoubted historic importance exemplifying those institutions of humanitarian service which Bahá'u'lláh Himself specified should cluster about the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in every city—and demonstrate the spirit of His Teachings.

As the friends will recall, the beloved Guardian attached such great importance to the various teaching conferences and institutes held all over the world that he included an enumeration of them in his annual Ridván Message. The following list of some of those held during the past year is most impressive, not only from the standpoint of the very large number of such gatherings which took place, but also in their wide geographical range.

The Conference held by the European Hands of the Cause in Brussels, Belgium, attended by their Auxiliary Board members and representatives of the National and Regional Assemblies of that continent; the National Teaching Conference in Blackpool, England; the Scottish Regional Teaching Conference in Glasgow; the Northern Ireland Regional Teaching Conference in Bangor; and the Northwest Regional Teaching Conference in Manchester, as well as numerous week-end schools held throughout the British Isles; the teaching and

study conferences held in the Benelux countries, in Charleroi, Liege, Antwerp, Brussels, and two at The Hague; the National Teaching Conference of France in Lyon, and of Italy in Rome, as well as the Swiss Teaching Conference in Bern; the Regional Teaching Conferences held in Germany, in Heilbronn, Wiesbaden, Tülingen, Köln, Darmstadt, Ludwigsburg, in Göppingen, Frankfurt, Karlsruhe and Ulm, as well as the three held in Nürnberg, and the two in Hannover; the teaching conferences held in India and Burma, in the cities of Rangoon, Devlali, Bangalore and Daidanaw, and in Colombo, Ceylon; the All-Pakistan Teaching Conference in Karachi; the many teaching conferences held throughout the length and breadth of the African continent and the surrounding islands, including two in Mauritius, one in Southern Rhodesia, four in South Africa, and one in the British Cameroons, in Tangiers, International Zone of Morocco, in Rabat, French Morocco, in Monrovia, Liberia, and in Mogadiscio, Italian Somaliland, as well as the seventeen week-end schools held in Central and East Africa; the Western Canada Summer Conference in Banff, the Maritimes Summer Conference in Shediac, New Brunswick, the Canadian Summer Teaching Conferences in Beaulac, Quebec, and in Ontario, as well as nearly twenty other teaching conferences held throughout the Dominion of Canada, from Prince Edward Island to British Columbia; the teaching conferences in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Ketchikan, the four major Bahá'í centres in Alaska; the Regional Teaching Conferences held in Rosario, Argentina, and in Quilpué, Chile, as well as the teaching conferences held in Asunción, Paraguay and in Montevideo, Uruguay; the Teaching Conference of Venezuela in Caracas, the All-Brazil Teaching Conference in Jundiai, and the International School held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; to which should be added the teaching conferences and week-end schools held throughout the United States, too numerous to mention.

The work at the heart and nerve centre of the Faith has progressed steadily during the period from last Ridván. In November the plenary meeting of the Hands of the Cause was held, at Bahjí—the second since the sudden passing of the beloved Guardian forced upon the Chief Stewards of the Faith such crushing responsibility. The mighty institution of Bahá'í pilgrimage, which began in the days of the Manifestation of God Himself, has been reopened, and a steady stream of friends from East and West has poured into the twin Holy

Cities of Haifa and ‘Akká, to kneel at the Threshold of the sacred Shrines, to visit the historic sites located here, to gaze in reverence at the relics so carefully collected and preserved by the beloved Guardian, to marvel at the beauty of the Shrine of the Báb and the International Archives Building erected under his direction and according to his own matchless taste, as well as to enjoy the wonderful gardens he designed and created on the slopes of Mt. Carmel and in the plain of ‘Akká, four thousand square metres of land on the ridge of Mount Carmel overlooking the resting-place of the Herald of the Faith, have been registered in the name of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Iran the sixty-six thousand square metres of land facing the Tomb of Bahá’u’lláh at Bahjí negotiations for the purchase of which were carried out at the Guardian’s instruction during his lifetime, have now been registered in the name of the Israel Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, in accordance with his wishes; the third terrace at Bahjí artificially created, and which enables the visitor to obtain an imposing view of the Holy Shrine and its gardens, was built according to his own plan on top of the two he had himself completed, and the strip of garden to the east of the Mansion of Bahá’u’lláh which he had planned to develop, was likewise completed, thus adding to the landscaped area at Bahjí another four thousand square metres of garden; the visitors to the Bahá’í Holy Places in both Haifa and ‘Akká, continue to pour in, the impressive number of over a hundred thousand having been received since last Ridván. During the past eighteen months, six Hands of the Cause have acted as substitutes for those who were permanently selected to serve in the Holy Land, but were temporarily absent either on some special mission or for reasons of health; five of the Hands of the Cause have, at the request of the Hands residing in the Holy Land, undertaken special teaching missions to assist the friends and their elected representatives in areas where either the need, or the promise of results, was the greatest.

The last three of the five mighty Intercontinental Conferences, called for by the beloved Guardian at the midway point of the World Crusade, were held in Chicago, Frankfurt and Singapore, and proved the vehicles for a communion of heart amongst the sorrowing believers the world over such as had never before been experienced in Bahá’í history. Over six thousand of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh

attended these Conferences, the greatest number being present at the one held in Europe on German soil, at which over twenty-five hundred Bahá'ís from Europe and Asia assembled; the next largest Conference was the one held in the heart of the North American continent, where almost two thousand were gathered, largely representative of believers from the Western Hemisphere; the African Intercontinental Conference, with the exception of some believers from Europe and America, and at which nine hundred friends assembled, was divided almost equally between African and Persian believers; at the Asian Intercontinental Conference about five hundred Bahá'ís highly representative of the peoples of South East Asia and the North Pacific area, were able to view the portrait of Bahá'u'lláh, whose Faith they have espoused, and to have a share in the bounties of the Conference the beloved Guardian had called for them, whilst in far-off Australia an attendance of almost three hundred Bahá'ís some of them from such distant places as Japan, Persia and the United States, reflected the progress the Cause of God has made in the Antipodes.

At all of these Conferences, in spite of the deep shadow of sorrow upon them, the believers, mindful of the beloved Guardian's words, praised and thanked the Founder of their Faith for His manifold blessings; reverently viewed His portrait, sent to them for this purpose as an act of loving-kindness, by the Guardian himself, consulted on ways and means of rapidly achieving the remaining goals of the Crusade; reviewed its great victories to date and poured forth over half a million dollars in contributions and pledges for the building of the Mother Temples of Africa, Australia and Europe, and the general work of the Ten Year Plan. So great has been the response to the beloved Guardian's appeal to the friends to rapidly build these sacred Houses of Worship that the Kampala Temple and the Sydney Temple, the cornerstones of which were laid during the African and Australian Intercontinental Conferences, respectively, are expected to be completed before Naw-Rúz 1960, and a large sum is now available for the construction of the European Mother Temple.

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind, as we survey the status of the Cause of God six years after the inception of the World Crusade, that the most imposing and in many ways the most difficult part of its

tasks were accomplished in the Guardian's own lifetime. One hundred and twenty-seven new territories have been included in the orbit of the Faith as a result of the departure of a veritable army of pioneers to all parts of the world. The Guardian, in the early years of the Ten Year Plan stated that this extraordinary achievement, "the most vital and spectacular objective of the Ten Year Plan", had been "virtually attained ere the termination of the first year of this decade-long, stupendous enterprise" through the opening of one hundred countries and islands. The dedication of two of the three Mother Temples called for in the provisions of this globe-encircling Plan will take place in the near future, and permission to build the third in Langenhain, near Frankfurt, has just been received from the County Council. All the Hazíratu'l-Quds, all the endowments, all the Temple sites originally called for in the World Crusade have been acquired. The Bahá'í Publishing Trusts enumerated by the beloved Guardian have been established. The number of Israel branches of various National Spiritual Assemblies to be formed in the Holy Land has been exceeded. The resting-place of the remains of the father of Bahá'u'lláh has been identified. Bahá'í women in Persia have been elected to the National and the Local Assemblies. The translation of Bahá'í literature into various languages has already exceeded the original objective set in 1953. Almost a third of the new National and Regional Assemblies which must be established before 1963 will have come into existence by the end of this Ridván.

This impressive tally of victories cannot but lift the hearts of all the believers and fill them with fresh courage to arise and win the remaining goals of the Crusade, in the name and for the sake of their beloved Guardian. Although the work before us may be less spectacular than that already accomplished, there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that upon its successful conclusion depends the ultimate triumph or failure of the entire Crusade. It constitutes no less than the bedrock of future Bahá'í activities for centuries to come, for upon it depends the erection, on a firm and lasting foundation, of those new National Assemblies which are to be among the first pillars of that mighty institution of Bahá'u'lláh, the Universal House of Justice. The task is a two-fold one: In the republics of Latin America and the ten Goal Countries of Europe immediate action must be taken to reinforce and bring to Assembly status those groups which are at the present time the most promising nuclei for new Assemblies, and

without the multiplication of which the new independent National Assemblies will lack the foundation the Guardian specified as prerequisites for their election. On the home front of such old and tried Bahá'í communities as Persia, the United States, Germany, Great Britain, Australia, India, Canada, Egypt and 'Iraq the same process must take place-promising groups must be immediately raised to Assembly status.

Careful consideration of the nature of the work facing the Bahá'í world during the coming four years reveals that the paramount need, one might almost say the sole need, is to raise a second glorious all-conquering army of pioneers, who will arise and go forth with the same rapidity, dedication and zeal as did that first glorious army in the opening years of the Crusade, and this time conquer, not new territories and islands, but new cities, towns and villages in the Western Hemisphere, Europe, Asia, North Africa and the Antipodes. We feel the Bahá'ís should have placed before them a factual picture of the work to be done in this field: In the United States, termed by our Guardian the base for operations in every continent of the globe, a hundred and three new Local Spiritual Assemblies must be formed; in the Dominion of Canada, thirty-two; in Latin America, over twenty; in the British Isles, twenty-five; in Germany, twelve; in the European Goal Countries, forty-five; in Persia, the Cradle of the Faith, a hundred and ten; in India, at least twenty-five; and in Australia and New Zealand, over twenty. This presents to each and every Bahá'í a tremendous personal challenge. Is he or she going to have a part, before it is too late, in the Guardian's Global Crusade, the purpose of which is primarily to lay that lasting foundation for the Universal House of Justice created in His Most Holy Book by Bahá'u'lláh? There is no longer time for hesitation, the sands of the Crusade are rapidly running out and with them each one's own great personal opportunity, never to recur. Every single believer must hold before himself the goal of either personally being responsible for the attainment of these objectives, through arising to pioneer himself, or through assisting his fellow-Bahá'ís to do so, and thus be instrumental in ensuring that by 1963 the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will be found in firmly grounded, well informed, actively functioning communities in every area where a National or Regional Assembly exists, and in many of the territories and major islands where His Cause has been established during the World Crusade.

We must face the fact that in Europe and Latin America where the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Plan requires that Regional Assemblies must be replaced by thirty-one National Assemblies, the needs of the various home fronts cannot be met locally. Bahá'u'lláh Himself has exhorted His followers to *"Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded."* The Hands of the Cause, mindful of these words, have recently proposed a joint deputization project to the Assemblies representative of the two strongest Bahá'í communities in the world, namely, Persia and America. The oppressed, steadfast and devoted Persian friends are ready and eager to go forth as pioneers in large numbers, but the barrier of language and many other complications such as obtaining visas for the countries where pioneers are required prevent them from doing so. The North American believers are, on the contrary, because of their citizenship, in a much better position to gain entry to these places so urgently in need of teachers and settlers; therefore this great joint undertaking, the first of its kind between the East and the West, has been set in motion, whereby the friends in the Cradle of the Faith can deputize their Bahá'í brothers and sisters who are, as the Guardian said, the spiritual descendants of the Dawn-breakers, to go forth and help win the Crusade. The Persian believers are now raising a fund to be transmitted through their National Assembly to the American National Assembly for this express purpose. It is our ardent hope that a tremendous response will be forthcoming, and that the North American Bahá'ís mindful of the truly extraordinary role the Guardian himself has said they must play as "the champion-builders of a divinely conceived Administrative Order, the standard-bearers of the all-conquering army of the Lord of Hosts, the torch-bearers of a future divinely inspired world civilization" will arise in large numbers and place themselves at the disposal of the committee responsible for this mass migration, ere it is too late, and not only cover themselves with imperishable glory, but by doing so, share the lustre of this achievement and sacrifice with their devoted brethren who have suffered so much and so long in Bahá'u'lláh's native land.

No message from the World Centre of the Faith would be complete that did not call upon the pioneers, whoever and wherever they are, be they serving in foreign fields or on the home fronts, be they old or young, robust or in frail health, of the Negro, the white or the brown race, to remain at their posts at this critical hour. There can be no doubt that in the sight of Shoghi Effendi it was the pioneers who accomplished the most difficult tasks of the Crusade, and because of the sacrifices, the consecration and the enthusiasm of these devoted souls, one hundred and twenty-seven territories of the globe, as well as hundreds of cities and localities on various home fronts received the light of Bahá'u'lláh. The importance the Guardian attached to the opening of these virgin areas and to the work of consolidation in those countries already possessing National Assemblies cannot be sufficiently emphasized. How dear to his heart were the services the pioneers rendered! How he cherished each one labouring in this vast field, often at the cost of great personal sacrifice! It is not possible for us to describe the wistful sadness and the look of concern and care that would pass over his blessed face when he received news that a goal had been abandoned for whatever reason, and was lacking a pioneer. We therefore appeal to the friends to remain at their posts, however great the difficulties confronting them, and to persevere in this vital field of service in order to fulfil the wishes of their beloved Guardian and to gladden his spirit in the Kingdom on High.

It is, we firmly believe, the supreme duty of all National and Regional Assemblies to concentrate their undivided attention during this particular year of the Crusade on procuring new pioneers and settling them with no delay whatsoever in those spots where their presence in the chosen objectives abroad or in the goal cities of the various home fronts will enable new Assemblies to be formed next Ridván. There can be no doubt that upon the success of such steps taken immediately depends the fortunes of our Guardian's Crusade, a Crusade which in its world-embracing scope, has carried the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá a mighty step forward in its unfoldment, and which must inevitably lead to the spiritual conquest of the entire planet.

The financial resources of the Bahá'í world must be mustered and expended at this time for the attainment of this mighty purpose. We

can do no better than appeal to each and every individual believer in the Guardian's own words: "Let them resolve, instantly and unhesitatingly, to place, each according to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Bahá'í sacrifice, lest, on a sudden, unforeseen calamities rob them of a considerable portion of the earthly things they have amassed."

Victories, however glorious, won in other fields, will be empty of their meaning if this most great victory is not achieved. Every follower of the Faith is aware of that great spiritual truth that God in His mercy and all-encompassing love does not require of His creatures something that He will not empower them to do. We cannot and must not fail. How many times have we been assured that the Concourse on High is ready and eager to rush forth and assist us to seize the palm of victory. Our Guardian never doubted our ability to accomplish the Plan he set for us; he entrusted it to our care and left this world, after so many years of sorrow and toil, for realms where his spirit could operate more freely. We cannot betray his sacred trust, we cannot disappoint the hopes he pinned on us or prove unworthy of the supreme confidence he showed us! Let us arise and win his Crusade and meet the challenge and fulfil the promise enshrined in one of his last messages: "The heights its champions must scale are indeed formidable. The pitfalls that bestrew their path are still numerous. The road leading to ultimate and total victory is tortuous, stony and narrow", he tells us. "Theirs, however, is the emphatic assurance, revealed by the Pen of the Most High—the Prime Mover of the forces unleashed by this world-girdling Crusade—that *'Whosoever ariseth to aid our Cause God will render him victorious over ten times ten thousand souls, and, should he wax in his love for Me, him will We cause to triumph over all that is in heaven and all that is on earth.'*"

"Putting on the armour of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such

triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.”

HANDS OF THE CAUSE IN THE HOLY LAND

April 1960

To Annual Bahá'í Conventions

Dearly beloved Friends:

Another twelve months of important Bahá'í events have revolved upon the mighty axis of our beloved Guardian's divinely inspired, world encompassing Crusade. Once again, at this blessed Ridván period, we pause to survey the accomplishments of the past year, to enumerate its victories and to assess the tasks that still lie ahead ere we reach the goal of 1963 and enter upon the celebration of the supreme Jubilee of our Faith, the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission—a Mission which casts its light forward over five hundred thousand years of human destiny. We Bahá'ís may well raise our hearts in thanksgiving to Him for the constant evidences of His unfailing grace, protection and guidance vouchsafed to us, the small but faithful band of His followers scattered throughout the populous and ancient centres of culture in both the East and the West, throughout the wildernesses of Africa and the New World, and the far-flung islands of the seas. In spite of the heavy blow we received so recently through earthly separation from our Guardian—a blow from which our hearts still bleed; in spite of our frailty as chosen instruments of God; in spite of the fewness of our numbers in the face of the teeming millions as yet unaware of the advent of the Promised One of all ages; in spite of the circumscribed nature of our material resources in spite of all these things we witness that this Faith of ours is receiving an uninterrupted impetus from the Will of Bahá'u'lláh and that its nascent institutions, given to us by Him, elaborated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and erected by Shoghi Effendi are multiplying in number, growing in strength, casting down deeper

roots into the life of society, increasing in prestige and demonstrating the power nascent within them which must flower eventually into a World Civilization and bring about that Golden Age which will in truth be the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth.

The process of knitting the Bahá'í world together and coordinating its far-flung activities, which was carried on from the World Centre of our Faith by the beloved Guardian, has steadily continued since his passing and bears witness to the enduring foundations he laid during the thirty-six years of unremitting toil and self-sacrifice which characterized his ministry. The brilliance of his planning, the far-reaching vision which inspired his decisions, the vitality of the Administrative Order he built up during his lifetime, continue to bear fruit. The "heart and nerve centre" of the Faith, the hub into which the spokes of this mighty wheel of God, this New World Order, fit has continued to function with unabated vitality, receiving its spiritual impetus from the twin Holy Shrines in which are laid to rest the Twin Manifestations of God for this Day, and pouring this life-force into the world-wide Community of the followers of the Most Great Name, in spite of having so recently passed through one of the worst crises in one hundred and seventeen years of Bahá'í history. The Ten Year Plan, the latest step in the unfoldment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan designed to bring about the spiritual conquest of the entire globe, has forged ahead in a truly miraculous manner since that grievous and fateful November day in 1957 which witnessed the removal of its guiding force, its Commander-in-Chief, the designer of its every phase, and the one to whom its prosecutors, whether Hands, Board members, administrative bodies, pioneers or teachers, looked for words of encouragement and guidance and from whom they eagerly anticipated receiving that measure of reward or acclaim that he in his wisdom and love might bestow upon them.

Not only has the unity of the Faith been protected, the plans of its enemies forestalled and its properties safeguarded, but the spirit of the believers has not faltered in the darkest hour of test. We may truly say that it is this great pact of faith in the hearts of the friends that has held the Cause steadily on the course chartered for it by its Guardian, and has been the magnet attracting so many new souls to the Faith during the past two years. It is this force of faith in Bahá'u'lláh and

love for Him that has swept the Bahá'ís of the world forward to such astonishing victories as the establishment during this present Ridván period of the entire number of Spiritual Assemblies specified by the beloved Guardian in the Ten Year Plan as the necessary foundation for the future independent national Bahá'í bodies of Latin America. Those responsible for this feat obeyed his behest to “. . . set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such triumphs . . . will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.” How shining are the evidences that this promised support has been vouchsafed to them by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Last Ridván with so many Local Assemblies still needed in Latin America, the heights still to be scaled seemed unattainable; this Ridván the banner of conquest floats proudly from every hilltop. How greatly must Shoghi Effendi's heart rejoice!

The truly extraordinary evidences of progress throughout the entire range of Bahá'í activity should cause us all to ponder anew the mysterious power of this Faith, to marvel at the secret springs that so constantly feed its needs, and to supplicate that during the coming year a still greater measure of Bahá'u'lláh's loving protection, His all-conquering strength, His unfailing guidance, may be vouchsafed to us in the prosecution of the beloved Guardian's mighty Crusade. With humble gratitude for the untiring and consecrated labours of our fellow-believers and deep joy in their achievements, we share with the friends the truly remarkable list of the major events and victories of this past year.

The number of territories comprising the World Community of the Most Great Name has now risen to the impressive total of two hundred and fifty-six, including all of the one hundred and thirty-one original virgin goals of the World Crusade listed by our beloved Guardian, with the exception of ten territories within the Soviet orbit. One of the most difficult objectives of the Ten Year Plan, Hainan Island, has recently been opened by a stalwart Knight of Bahá'u'lláh of Chinese origin, adding another pearl to that chain of islands girdling the Asiatic mainland.

The steady process of multiplication of localities where Bahá'ís reside in all parts of the globe has raised the total of these centres to over five thousand eight hundred, far exceeding “the goal of five thousand Bahá'í centres in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres” called for by our beloved Guardian in his Ridván Message three short years ago. More than thirteen hundred localities have been added since his passing, over six hundred of these during the past year alone.

This uninterrupted expansion, brought about by the twin processes of dispersion and enrolment of new believers, has brought the number of such centres in the Goal Countries of Europe to more than a hundred and forty; in Germany and Austria, to a hundred and forty-eight; in the British Isles to a hundred and fifty-one; in Australasia and in the Dominion of Canada, respectively, to nearly a hundred and sixty; in the Indian subcontinent to a hundred and eighty; in Latin America to nearly three hundred and forty; in the Pacific area to over five hundred; in Persia to more than one thousand and seventy; in the African continent to eleven hundred and forty; and in the United States of America to nearly fifteen hundred and seventy.

In the African continent and throughout the Pacific region, areas encompassing almost half of the original one hundred and thirty-one virgin territories to be opened during the World Crusade, extraordinary progress continues to be made, the rate of increase far surpassing that in any other parts of the world and bearing conclusive witness to the spiritual vitality in the hearts of their indigenous peoples. As evidence of this mighty process of conversion now taking place, we may cite the fact that over four hundred new centres have been added in Africa during the past two years, and over two hundred in the Pacific region during the last twelve months. In Latin America, the scene next year of the formation of no less than twenty-one new National Spiritual Assemblies, more than a hundred centres have been added since last Ridván a feat the magnitude of which cannot be sufficiently stressed when one considers the vast territory involved and the relatively small number of believers able to carry forward the work of the Crusade.

The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, referred to by our Guardian as the “foundation of the edifice of a rising Order”, is rapidly approaching one thousand five hundred, reflecting an increase of almost two hundred in each of the last two Ridván periods. Of these more than two hundred and forty are now incorporated.

Over half of the thirty-one National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies now established have achieved the Crusade goal of incorporation, seventeen having so far secured this legal registration, the latest being the energetic National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Burma, which has just received, less than a year after its own formation, official recognition by the Government of the Union of Burma.

Translations of the continually expanding literature of the Faith have now been made in two hundred and sixty-eight different languages, representing an increase of nearly one hundred and eighty since the inception of the Crusade. Ninety-six of these are supplementary to those originally specified by our beloved Guardian in the Ten Year Plan. During the Crusade years Bahá'í literature has been translated into all of the European languages called for in the Plan; into eighty-two of the indigenous languages of Asia; sixty-five of Africa; and over twenty in the Americas.

Progress in erecting the three great Mother Temples of Africa, Australasia and Europe is steadily continuing. Practically three years before the end of the World Crusade the beautiful and highly suitable Mashriqu'l-Adhkár at present reaching completion in the heart of Africa, will be dedicated, during this coming August, at a ceremony attended by believers from many districts and territories of what was once known as the “dark continent” but now shines as one of the brightest regions of the entire Bahá'í world. The Temple in Sydney, Australia, is rising at a rapid pace, and already this great “silent teacher” of the Antipodes is attracting wide publicity and the attention of thousands of people who pass by it daily on an adjacent main highway. It is anticipated that its dedication will take place early in 1961. The plans for the European Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, long the

subject of opposition on the part of certain church elements in Germany, are now well advanced and it is hoped that construction can commence during the coming months at the Temple site near Frankfurt. These historic first steps in the process of erecting Houses of Worship and their attendant institutions, which play such an important part in the Bahá'í society envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, are being followed up and supported through the purchase of many sites for future Temples. During the past year, Japan, Austria, Bolivia, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic have acquired plots of land for this purpose, raising the number of such sites since the inauguration of the Ten Year Plan to the truly impressive total of thirty-three.

Among the many other properties added in various parts of the world during the past year to the already impressive list of Bahá'í holdings, the following are of special interest because of the official recognition which their acquisition has involved, giving increasing emphasis to the independent character of the Faith, and adding to its prestige: The approval, by the District Commissioner of Kenya, of the allocation of two plots of land in village areas for Bahá'í purposes, and the pending approval of a third plot; the authorization, confirmed through a special decree issued by the Ministry of Finance in Laos, for the Bahá'í Community in Vientiane to own in its name a plot of land as an endowment; and the recognition by Governmental authorities of Bahá'í burial grounds as such in Abbotabad, Nawabshah and Montgomery, in Pakistan, and in Seremban, Malaya, the three latter sites being direct allocations of Government land for the purpose of establishing separate Bahá'í cemeteries.

Another evidence of the growing recognition of the independent character of the Faith is the continued expansion in the number of territories, states, provinces and other civic units where the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate is legally accepted. Such recognition has now been granted in nearly forty-five different countries and political subdivisions, the latest additions being the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in the Dominion of Canada. The Bahá'í Holy Days are now officially recognized by school authorities in eighty different countries, states and cities. In the United States, including Alaska, more than ten new areas have been added since last Ridván.

In the African continent, the onward march of the Faith bears eloquent testimony to the spiritual receptivity of its inhabitants, so strongly emphasized by our beloved Guardian, and reflected, even before his passing, in the beginnings of that mass conversion confidently predicted by him. As a result of the intensive teaching campaigns launched by the four African Regional Assemblies, the number of declared believers throughout this vast continent has risen to well over fifteen thousand, seven thousand having been added since last Ridván. In Central and East Africa, the number of enrolled believers has more than doubled in the short space of a year. Over four thousand new declarations have been recorded in Uganda alone since April 1959, nearly twelve hundred in Kenya, and well over two hundred in Tanganyika. In the Belgian Congo, also, the beginnings of mass conversion are becoming evident. In the far-flung territories under the jurisdiction of the Regional Assembly of South and West Africa, a gain of over sixty percent has occurred during the past twelve months in the total number of adherents of the Faith. The zeal of the new believers in this area is well illustrated, by the recent settlement of the Island of Sesse in Lake Victoria, an accomplishment of a nature ever dear to Shoghi Effendi's heart. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the whole of Africa has reached a total of three hundred and seventy-six, an increase of well over two hundred since the passing of the beloved Guardian. Representatives of two hundred and seventy-three different African tribes are now included in the membership of the Bahá'í Community. Noteworthy among the many new instances of official recognition accorded the Faith during the past year are: The establishment and registration of the first Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Africa, in Kampala, Uganda; the inclusion of "Bahá'í" on the official census sheet as one of the religions of Swaziland; and the registration of the Hazíratu'l-Quds of Port Victoria, Seychelles as a religious property, thereby exempting it from all taxation.

The Pacific area, exclusive of Australasia, competing with the African continent for that "Palm of victory" so often mentioned by the beloved Guardian himself, continues to fulfil the high expectations held by him for the rapid advancement of the Faith throughout its widely dispersed countries, islands and territories. Last year the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in this region had reached one short of the hundred mark double the number which

existed in 1957, and a further substantial increase is anticipated during the present Riḍván period. In the region of South-East Asia, the number of declared believers now exceeds seven thousand five hundred, including over forty-eight hundred in the Mentawai Islands alone. In addition to the astounding progress being made there, more than a thousand new believers have entered the Faith in Indonesia during the period since Riḍván, 1959. In the ten island groups comprising the territory of the Regional Assembly of the South Pacific, there are now nearly sixty localities. A three-fold increase in the number of centres in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands has occurred in the past year, and news has recently been received that on one of these islands, to which the first Gilbertese Bahá'í was banished because of his association with the Faith, nearly fifty new believers have recently been enrolled, due to his single-handed efforts. One Hazíratu'l-Quds has already been completed in this remote outpost, and two more are under construction.

In the vast territory of the Western Hemisphere, including within its confines the Cradle of the Administrative Order, as well as those republics whose rulers were addressed by Bahá'u'lláh in such insistent and weighty terms, the number of localities to which the light of His Faith has penetrated now totals nearly two thousand one hundred, well over three hundred of which constitute Local Spiritual Assemblies; almost a hundred and forty of these are now incorporated. The rapid spread of the Faith among the Indians of South America in recent months has rivaled the extraordinary progress made in the heart of the African continent and the islands of the Pacific, and may well foreshadow a parallel process of mass conversion in the New World. In Bolivia, a seven-fold increase in the number of Indian believers has occurred since last Riḍván bringing the total to over the one thousand mark, drawn from almost a hundred different localities. As many as twenty-five new all-Indian Local Spiritual Assemblies may be formed in this country alone during the current Riḍván period. Throughout the Americas contact has been established with more than sixty different tribes since the inception of the Crusade, evidence of the steady progress made in carrying the Teachings to these indigenous peoples to whose enrolment in the Faith both 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and our beloved Guardian attached such great importance.

Among the many instances of an ever-wider proclamation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh during recent months, the following may be cited as an indication of the wide geographical area now being reached, and a testimony to the increasing official and public recognition of the Faith as an independent religion: The Australia-wide press and publicity campaign recently initiated by the National Assembly of that country; the first publicity received over both radio and television in the British Isles; the broadcast of a program consisting of Bahá'í Sacred Writings over the All-India Radio from New Delhi; the presentation of the Message to the people of Japan on Radio Tokyo, and from a national television station in that country; the time accorded to a Bahá'í speaker in Switzerland over Radio Lausanne, as well as the television interview granted a travelling teacher in France, which was telecast from two principal stations in that country; the allocation of radio broadcast time to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Suva, Fiji Islands, along with other religions, including Christian, Hindu and Muslim; and the notable increase in publicity freely accorded the Faith in the United States of America, particularly in connection with such Bahá'í-sponsored events as World Religion Day, Race Amity Day, and the Bahá'í observance of United Nations Week.

An enumeration of the various teaching conferences, institutes and week-end schools held throughout the world during the last twelve months is most impressive, not only because of the very large number which took place, but also because nearly every part of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is represented. Though not necessarily complete, the following is a representative list of these gatherings, which our beloved Guardian considered to be a demonstration of the zeal and earnestness of the believers in "discharging their primary obligation to propagate their Faith": The Austrian Teaching Conferences held during the past winter in Vienna, and in Linz, as well as the first Austrian Youth Winter School in Krieglach; the Benelux Teaching Conference in Brussels; the striking total of one hundred and sixteen teaching conferences, one-day and week-end schools held in twenty-four different cities and towns in the British Isles; the Regional Teaching Conferences held in Germany, in Hannover, Heilbronn, Köln, Stuttgart, Ulm, and two in Frankfurt; the two Regional Teaching Conferences held in France, in Orleans and Montpellier; the six Regional Teaching Conferences held in the

Iberian Peninsula; the Teaching Conference for the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, in Zurich, and that for French Switzerland, in Lausanne; the Italian Teaching Conference, in Rome; the Finnish Teaching Conference, in Helsinki; the three Teaching Conferences of India, in New Delhi, Kanpur, and Mysore; the Teaching Conferences of Japan, in Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki; the Teaching Conference of East Pakistan, at Dacca, and of West Pakistan, at Lyallpore; the forty-five teaching conferences and week-end schools held in Central and East Africa, including thirty-five in Uganda, four in Kenya, four in Tanganyika, and one in Ruanda-Urundi; the teaching conferences and teacher training schools held in Mauritius, Mozambique, both Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Swaziland, the Union of South Africa, and Zululand; the many teaching conferences in the Australian continent, including three in each of the States of Victoria, and Queensland, respectively, two each in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, and the same number in Tasmania; the teaching conferences held in all of the main centres of the North Island of New Zealand; the first All-Philippine Teaching Conference, in Manila, and the conferences held in Indonesia, Malaya, and other areas of Southeast Asia; the Teaching Conferences of the South Pacific Islands, at Tuarabu Village, in the Gilbert and Ellice group, in Apia, Western Samoa, the three conferences held in the Tongan Islands, and the Fiji Teaching Conference in Suva; the Winter Workshop held on the campus of the University of Alaska, at Fairbanks; the Winter Conference in Ketchikan, Alaska; the All-Argentine Teaching Conference, in Rosario, and similar conferences held in Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay; the National Teaching Conferences of Peru, in Lima, and of Brazil, in Niteroi; the twenty-five teaching conferences held in Canada, covering every province of the Dominion, and including thirteen in Ontario alone; the Costa Rica Teaching Conference in San Jose; the Teaching Conference of Nicaragua, held in Managua; the All-Mexico Conference, in Mexico City; the Youth Congress held in Guatemala City; the Inter-community Teaching Conference of Panama, in La Chorrera; the Honduran Teaching Conference, held in Taulabe; the three International Schools of the Greater Antilles, one in Ciudad Trujillo, Dominican Republic, and two in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as well as two National Teaching Conferences in the same area; and the series of nation-wide conferences, nearly sixty in number, held in the United States of America, sponsored by the National

Spiritual Assembly, and aimed at creating a deeper understanding of the needs of the Cause at this present stage of the World Crusade, and designed to lend a marked impetus to the teaching work, both abroad and on the home front, as well as approximately sixty additional Area Teaching Conferences held throughout the length and breadth of that country.

The recapitulation of facts such as these, concrete evidence of the astonishing forward march of this irresistible, divinely-inspired Plan, cannot but fill our souls with courage and determination to arise and carry out the remaining tasks of the World Crusade with greater vigour and dedication than ever before.

The supreme importance and significance of the World Centre of the Faith, irrevocably fixed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the Holy Land, and constantly stressed by the Guardian in his writings, has emerged since his passing and looms before us in its stupendous outlines, as the Most Great Jubilee approaches and the institutions of the World Centre evolve. It is incumbent upon the Bahá'ís particularly their elected National and Regional representatives, to realize that the unity of the Faith and the necessary uniform spread of its activities depend upon the proper co-ordination and protection which is given from the World Centre. National or Regional plans or interests cannot be permitted to sacrifice the overall interests of a closely-knit, smoothly functioning World Community. The eagerness of the Assemblies, and the believers they represent, each striving to attain in its own area a greater measure of development, to raise up new institutions such as Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temples, schools and endowments, must be at once fostered and contained; fostered so that the Faith may arise locally in all its glory and power in different parts of the world; contained and directed so that each part whilst expanding and developing as fast as possible may not place in jeopardy the work of another area or undertake over-expansion or expenditure at the expense of another member of this single entity—a World Community. A constant consultative flow of communications must ever-increasingly, as the Crusade draws to its close, pass in and out of Haifa between the various National and Regional Assemblies and the Hands of the Faith in the Holy Land upon whom has devolved the task at this critical

juncture in Bahá'í history of safeguarding and promoting the world interests and world-wide progress of the Cause of God.

During this year of momentous preparation for the election of no less than twenty-one new National Spiritual Assemblies in Central America, the Antilles and South America, a ceaseless effort must be exerted on the part of all those responsible for the fulfilment of these supremely important goals of the Crusade in order to ensure that the newly elected Local Assemblies, as well as those previously elected, remain at their present level, that they be deepened in faith and understanding of the Administrative Order, that the Communities they represent are increased in number and the rank and file of the believers more deeply confirmed in the spirit of the Faith and encouraged to serve its interests and spread its knowledge among the peoples of their respective countries. This is going to require arduous work on the part of those devoted and consecrated pioneers who constitute the vanguard of Bahá'u'lláh's advancing hosts; it is going to mean more pioneers and teachers may still be required in this strategic field of service; it will entail on the part of the Mother Community in North America an unabated flow of assistance in the form of loving consultation, cooperation and guidance, as well as a supply of material means from this more prosperous and richly blessed community to these struggling new daughter communities, rich in spirit and in promise, but often lacking in the financial resources necessary to attain their objectives and maintain their centres it is going to necessitate further outpourings of treasure from the devoted self-sacrificing followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Cradle of the Faith who already, through the operation of the Persia-America deputization plan, have been responsible during the past eighteen months for much of the present spectacular success we now enjoy in the Latin American field; it will entail a greater measure of activity on the part of both the Board members and the elected representatives of the present four Regional National Assemblies functioning in this area. It must inevitably draw heavily upon the strength and the time—so fleeting, so short and therefore so precious—of the Hands of the Faith, both those serving at the World Centre and those allotted to the Western Hemisphere. We are confident, however, that these needs can and will be met and the glorious prize now well within our reach be seized in all its perfection and the new National Assemblies emerge

next Ridván in all their promise, prepared to assume their function as pillars of that Universal House of Justice so soon to be born.

We are evidently entering a new phase in the unfoldment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Plan for the spiritual conquest of the entire planet. A movement can be seen in different parts of the world such as has not been witnessed since the inception of this Cause in Persia. The masses are beginning to stir, to raise their eyes and look questioningly upon the Message we are presenting to them; at first by hundreds, now in some places by thousands, they are embracing this Faith, fulfilling the prophecies of the Master and the words of the Guardian. Although at the present time this new process is taking place largely amongst the so-called more primitive members of human society, introducing into the Bahá’í family of peoples much needed qualities of both heart and mind, we have every reason to believe it presages similar movements of mass conversion in other territories.

The impact of the passing of our beloved Guardian, the electric shock it administered to the entire body of the believers, the fire of sorrow and test through which they passed and from which they are emerging stronger than ever before, cannot but release, as has every major crisis in the past history of our Faith, a fresh flow of those forces which mysteriously and irresistibly lead it to new victories, widen the pale of its influence, and swell the ranks of its followers. In view of this conspicuous process now taking place we call upon those pioneers and believers struggling in distant and difficult fields and particularly those in the recently opened territories, to persevere in their labours, to take fresh heart, to appreciate the spiritual significance of the service they are rendering and remain steadfastly at their posts—posts so dear to our beloved Guardian and to which he attached such great importance. Though the soil of men’s hearts be infertile, the spiritual climate of their thoughts inhospitable and the promised harvest seem but a distant dream, let them remember their sacred responsibility as Bahá’u’lláh’s “forward-marching warriors” and steadfastly persevere in their task until they not only achieve success, but God willing, in the end bless the land they have served so faithfully by laying their bones to rest in it, as many a pioneer has done before them, and their graves become places of visitation for future generations.

The recent, little short of miraculous, achievements in Latin America demonstrate to us what hidden springs of strength are released in us when we obey the behests of our Guardian. They prove to us that the promised aid of the Supreme Concourse is at hand, eager to assist us, and that in the words of Shoghi Effendi its “invisible battalions are mustered, rank upon rank, ready to pour forth reinforcements from on High” and sustain even the humblest service undertaken in the Path of God. Very little time remains to us if we are to accomplish fully and with resounding success the tasks allotted to us by Shoghi Effendi in the last, mighty Plan we received from him, the final fruit of his divinely-inspired mind. We need not, we cannot, and we will not fail him. It lies within our power to seal with complete victory his world-encircling Crusade. This can only be done, however, if mighty and ceaseless efforts are made by each and every believer and more particularly those who form a part of such richly blessed and favoured Communities as those in the Cradle of the Faith and in the Cradle of its Administrative Order. Aside from the task of consolidating and maintaining the work in Latin America, prior to the election in Riḍván 1961 of the twenty-one independent National Assemblies to be formed there, a tremendous amount of work faces the Bahá’ís whether they be Hands, national bodies entrusted with specific tasks, teachers or pioneers. In Europe, where no less than eleven National Assemblies must be formed in the spring of 1962, the requisite number of Local Assemblies, the foundation for these new institutions, is far from being complete. Approximately forty must be constituted by next April. The field is difficult, the people, sunk in materialism, often cynical and disillusioned as a result of two world wars, are indifferent to religious truth and preoccupied with the economic problems and social diversions of a highly civilized continent. All these factors constitute one of the greatest challenges of the entire Crusade. A Faith, however, for which twenty thousand of its adherents died as martyrs, which has planted its banner in a little over a hundred years in two hundred and fifty-six territories of the globe, embracing every independent nation, every dominion, mandate and trust territory and all the major islands of the world, whose valiant pioneers and teachers are scattered like life-giving seed in every comer of the planet, has the power within it to sweep away every obstacle in its path. If the present National Assemblies focus their strength and concentrate their thoughts, resources and energies on the goals they must attain; if the individual believers consult their

hearts and their consciences and arise and proceed to the battle-fronts most in need of their assistance; then the power placed by God in the Ten Year Plan, the third and final stage of the initial epoch in the evolution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Master Plan, will, like a mighty tidal wave, sweep away every remaining obstacle and carry us to glorious victory.

We must face the fact that a still greater measure of self-sacrifice is required of us than perhaps at any previous time in the prosecution of the World Crusade. Two-thirds of this Crusade is already won; the opening of the virgin territories, the translation of our literature into so many diversified languages, the erection of continental Houses of Worship, the multiplication of Assemblies and centres the increasing recognition of the independent character of our Faith, the incorporation of its administrative bodies, the formation of new national bodies, are either accomplished facts or now lie well within our grasp. The last third, however, still remains. The new National Assemblies must be securely raised on their specified foundations; the home fronts, the very bedrock of existing older National Assemblies, which have lagged far behind the general rate of progress achieved in other fields, must now receive the assistance which alone can fulfil their objectives, namely, a wide increase in settlers and an influx of new souls enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh through a renewed and unremitting teaching effort. And finally, the European Temple, one of the most important goals of the Ten Year Plan, still remains to be erected. The accomplishment of these tasks not only requires a fresh dedication to our work on the part of every single believer, but of necessity will demand a great outpouring of our material resources. The strength of the Cause of God in all Dispensations, however, has been in the rank and file of its adherents; it is the meek, the obscure, the poor, indeed often the needy, who have arisen like veritable spiritual giants and established its institutions, raised its first precious edifices, carried its Message to the masses, laid down their lives for its Teachings, and demonstrated the regenerating spiritual power of the Word of its Manifestation. So today, as our Guardian's Crusade approaches its end, it is to the rank and file of the believers that we must look. From them will come its heroes, saints and martyrs; they will be the ones to fulfil the hopes of Shoghi Effendi to realize the promises of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to lay the

foundations of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on an unshakeable foundation, to win the ultimate victory.

The beloved Guardian made quite clear the supreme role of every single Bahá'í. He said, one year after the inception of the World Crusade, that "This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and ensure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Centre of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part."

The Master has made clear in an impelling and impassioned appeal, the overwhelming potency of the forces released by Bahá'u'lláh, which activate those who respond to His call. These words surely leave none of us any excuse for failing in our duty to God, Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause: *"The undying Fire which the Lord of the Kingdom hath kindled in the midst of the holy Tree is burning fiercely in the midmost heart of the world. The conflagration it will provoke will envelop the whole earth. Its blazing flames will illuminate its peoples and kindreds. All the signs have been revealed; every prophetic allusion hath been manifested. Whatever hath been enshrined in all the Scriptures of the past hath been made evident. To doubt or hesitate is no more possible . . . Time is pressing. The Divine Charger is impatient, and can tarry no longer. Ours is the duty to rush forward and, ere it is too late, win the victory."*

HANDS OF THE CAUSE IN THE HOLY LAND

April 1961

To Annual Bahá'í Conventions

Dearly beloved Friends:

“Every nation in the Western Hemisphere is illumined by the rays and woven into the fabric of Bahá'u'lláh's triumphant Administrative Order.” Such, in the beloved Guardian's own words, is the nature of the unique victory the entire Bahá'í world is celebrating during this blessed Ridván period, when twenty-one new and independent National Spiritual Assemblies are being elected throughout the length and breadth of Latin America. An enterprise officially inaugurated twenty-four years ago, through the launching of the first Seven Year Plan, has been gloriously consummated. The “onward marching legions of the army of Bahá'u'lláh” pause in wonder and survey with grateful hearts their majestic conquests. “That pioneer movement for which” Shoghi Effendi stated “the entire machinery” of the Administrative Order had “been primarily designed and erected” has yielded a mighty harvest. No less than twenty-four independent National Spiritual Assemblies now comprise the links in the mighty chain of Bahá'í solidarity, stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Strait of Magallanes. Humbly, and with infinite gratitude, the followers of the Blessed Beauty lay before His throne this blazing crown in the name and in the memory of their Guardian, for it is essentially his victory, the witness of his faithful and superhuman efforts to implement that Divine Plan for the spiritual conquest of the entire planet which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted to his care, to him who was the Sign of God on earth.

An occasion for such rejoicing cannot be allowed to pass without reviewing the antecedents of this overwhelming victory in the Western Hemisphere, which comprises half of the globe, which embraces the entire New World, and which the Guardian said was “the first region in the Western World to be warmed and illumined by the rays of God’s infant Faith.” He stated that in a sense the original impetus of the world teaching plan of the Master was given when the Báb in the opening years of the first Bahá’í century, directed the “*‘peoples of the West’* to issue forth *‘from your cities and aid His Cause.’*” Many times he pointed out that ever since “the momentous and stirring summons” was “issued by the Author of the Revelation in His Most Holy Book, addressed to the rulers of all the Republics of the Western Hemisphere,” the uninterrupted blessings of God had been poured upon the American continent. Bahá’u’lláh Himself testified that “*In the East the Light of His Revelation hath broken; in the West the signs of His dominion have appeared*”, whilst ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1917, in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, made the extraordinary pronouncement that “*the continent of America is, in the eyes of the one True God, the land wherein the splendours of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled . . .*” “*The American continent*”, He affirmed, “*gives signs and evidences of very great advancement. Its future is even more promising . . . It will lead all nations spiritually.*”

Within the northern confines of a continent upon which had already been conferred such a remarkable station, the American Bahá’í Community was singled out for unique honours; it was “a community”, Shoghi Effendi wrote, “invested with spiritual primacy by the Author of the immortal Tablets constituting the Charter of the Master Plan of the appointed Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant.” In majestic and ringing words the Guardian himself gave the rank and titles of this favoured community, whose mission is so unbelievably great, whose responsibilities are so staggering. Its members were, he said: “the spiritual descendants of the Dawn-breakers of the Heroic Age of the Bahá’í Faith, the chief repository of the immortal Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan, the foremost executors of the Mandate issued by the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, the champion-builders of a divinely conceived Administrative Order, the standard-bearers of the all-conquering army of the Lord of Hosts, the torchbearers of a future divinely inspired world civilization . . .”

A community, called by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh” and specifically instructed by Him in the Tablets of the Divine Plan to carry the Message of His Father to all the Republics of Latin America and the islands fringing them in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was launched officially in 1937 on its mission of spiritual conquest when the Guardian set in motion the first Seven Year Plan. The precursor of this historic event was a letter from him written in May, 1936, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada in which he said a “systematic, carefully conceived . . . plan should be devised” whose “supreme . . . objective should be the permanent establishment of at least one centre in every State of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent . . .” The significance of this first Plan was increasingly revealed to the Bahá’í world. When two years had elapsed Shoghi Effendi wrote: “The five remaining years should essentially be consecrated to the imperative, the spiritual needs of the remaining Republics of both Central and South America, for whose entry into the fellowship of Bahá’u’lláh the Plan was primarily formulated.” As the “carrying of the sacred Fire to all the Republics of the Western Hemisphere” went forward, the tone of jubilation in the Guardian’s Messages mounted. “From Alaska to Chile,” he wrote in 1942, “the Americas are astir with the leavening influences of the rising Order of the new-born Revelation.” He said the “first fruits of the Divine Plan” had been garnered there in abundance and that the first Seven Year Plan, commenced on the eve of the greatest war the human race had ever experienced, had, “despite six years of chaos and tribulation, been crowned with a success far exceeding the most sanguine hopes of its ardent promoters. Within so short a period, during such troublous years, such exploits were achieved as will forever illuminate the pages of Bahá’í history.” On the eve of the holding of the first All-America Convention in 1944, celebrating the Centenary of the “first, most shining century of the Bahá’í Era”, in that “great turning point in the history of our Faith” when “a spiritual front extending the entire length of the Western Hemisphere” had been established, when “the crowning act of an entire century” had been accomplished, when the administrative structure of the Faith was already “raising its triumphant head in the Central and South American Republics”, when his heart was “filled with joy, love, pride and gratitude”, when “the greatest collective enterprise ever launched in the course of the history of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” had been

successfully concluded, Shoghi Effendi wrote: “A victory of undying fame has marked the culmination of the fifty-year-long labours of the American Bahá’í community in the service of Bahá’u’lláh and has shed imperishable lustre on the immortal records of His Faith during the first hundred years of its existence.” In words such as these he sang the praises of the Community of the Most Great Name in the North American continent and indicated to the Bahá’í world the nature of the victories won during the first Seven Year Plan, not the least of which were the brilliant achievements in the southern part of the Western Hemisphere.

Two years later the American Bahá’í community was called upon to launch the second Seven Year Plan—a plan which the Guardian said surpassed every enterprise undertaken during the first Bahá’í century. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan was steadily gathering momentum. Whereas at the end of the first Seven Year Plan fourteen of the Latin American republics had established Local Assemblies, the remainder possessing groups only, whilst the total number of localities had risen to a little over fifty, by June 1947 there were thirty-seven Spiritual Assemblies and believers were to be found in over a hundred localities. To this extraordinary progress the beloved Guardian at that time paid a unique tribute: “No community”, he wrote, “since the inception of the hundred-year-old Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not even the community of the Most Great Name in the North American continent, can boast of an evolution as rapid, a consolidation as sound, a multiplication of centres as swift, as those that have marked the birth and rise of the community of His followers in Latin America” whose motherlands had “been chosen as the scene of the earliest victories won by the prosecutors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan”. He called upon them to “bestir themselves for the collective, the historic and gigantic tasks that await them”. He said the constitution of their National Spiritual Assemblies for the northern and southern zones was “one of the most vital objectives of the Second Seven Year Plan”. He said these two National Assemblies were the “precursors of the institutions which must participate in the election, and contribute to the support, of the Universal House of Justice”, and that they must lead, “gradually and uninterruptedly . . . to the constitution in each of the republics of Central and South America, of a properly elected, fully representative National Assembly, constituting thereby the last stage in the administrative evolution” of the Faith in Latin America.

Slowly the magnitude of Latin America's destiny unfolded. Upon the occasion of the formation in 1951 of the two first Regional Assemblies in that part of the world, he wrote them that "these communities may be said to have been invested with rights and duties which no community in any continent of the Eastern Hemisphere can claim to possess." He pointed out that these "newly-fledged, spiritually alert communities in Central and South America . . . are expected by their brethren, in both the East and the West, to worthily play their part as associates of the chief executors of the Plan bequeathed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá." With the launching of the World Crusade in 1953 new honours and responsibilities fell to the lot of these communities and the national bodies that represented them; in addition to the truly staggering plans made for them in their homelands, no less than nineteen new and previously opened territories were apportioned them as their share in this new globe-encircling phase of the Divine Plan—territories so far afield that some of them were situated in the very heart of the Pacific Ocean. Yet after the lapse of eight years nearly every major task at home and abroad set for them by their beloved Guardian has been fully and nobly achieved and the few remaining tasks required to perfect their labours are now well within their reach.

Such, briefly, is the history leading up to the formation of these twenty-one supreme administrative bodies. The mysterious impetus imparted by the Báb in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', the singular, significant and dynamic statements of Bahá'u'lláh, the innumerable references of the beloved Master culminating in His Plan for the spiritual conquest of the entire globe, the detailed, brilliant and inspiring strategy worked out by Shoghi Effendi during his thirty-six-years Guardianship, the "daring exploits" of so many valiant Bahá'í pioneers, teachers and administrators all have contributed to bring the Bahá'í world to this magnificent consummation, this unique event.

Though this is the end of a long journey, it is only the beginning of a glorious future for these new national bodies, and the communities they represent. They must remember that they share with the North American Bahá'í Community, as its appointed "associates", a special responsibility in the prosecution of every phase in the successive unfoldment of the plans which form stages in the evolution of what

the Guardian called the “Grand Design delineated in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s immortal Tablets”; the members of these new communities share in what Shoghi Effendi characterized as “the phenomenal destiny which the followers of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the New World are to fulfil.” They are, now, he wrote, “launched on their crusade for the spiritual conquest of the whole planet”.

Before passing on to survey the victories won in other fields during the past year, we should recognize that aside from the fact that twenty nations and one dependency are electing their supreme Bahá’í administrative bodies, an additional event of far-reaching significance is taking place. “*The islands of the West Indies*”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, “. . . have great importance; especially the two black republics, Haiti and Santo Domingo . . .” It is these republics which are now rearing up two of those autonomous pillars so soon to bear the weight of the Universal House of Justice. Who can doubt that these two new national communities, seconded by their sister community in Jamaica, and representative of that race which Bahá’u’lláh Himself likened to the “*pupil of the eye*” through which He claimed “*the light of the spirit shineth forth*”, will greatly enrich the supra-national world-wide fellowship of His Faith and herald the day when innumerable other black nations of the continent of Africa elect their own independent National Assemblies.

The remarkable record of victories achieved since last Ridván in the prosecution of the World Crusade of our beloved Guardian—the completion of which he indicated would mark the end of the first epoch in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—bears eloquent testimony to the devotion and sacrifice with which the friends in every part of the globe have striven to fulfil his cherished hopes and high expectations. As the eighth year of the Ten Year Plan draws to a close, the believers everywhere may gain fresh inspiration and encouragement from the imposing list of achievements recorded during the past year.

The light of the Faith, now radiating from two hundred and fifty-seven countries, islands and dependencies, now covers the face of the globe, bringing to fulfilment the many prophecies foreshadowing the

worldwide spread of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh ere the close of the first century following the declaration of His Mission, referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as *"the dawn of the Sun of Truth"*

In his last Ridván Message the beloved Guardian called upon the friends in all continents to exert strenuous efforts to assure the "early attainment of the goal of five thousand Bahá'í centres in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres." By Ridván two years later, less than eighteen months after his passing, this goal was not only attained but exceeded, when the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside reached a total of over five thousand two hundred. This Ridván, as a result of the continuing dispersion of pioneers and the winning of fresh recruits to the ranks of the Faith, the total has risen to the truly impressive level of nearly six thousand five hundred, a gain of no less than four thousand centres since the inception of the World Crusade in 1953.

This rapid process of multiplication of centres has brought the number of localities in Germany and Austria to a hundred and fifty; in the British Isles to a hundred and fifty-three; in Australasia to nearly a hundred and sixty; in Canada to a hundred and seventy-one; in the goal countries of Europe to nearly a hundred and seventy-five; in the fast-awakening Indian sub-continent to nearly two hundred and thirty; in Latin America to nearly three hundred and sixty; in the entire Pacific area to nearly six hundred; in Persia to more than one thousand and eighty; in the rapidly developing African continent to over fifteen hundred; and in the United States of America to nearly one thousand six hundred.

Particularly noteworthy is the rate of increase which has occurred in the four widely dispersed areas of the Indian sub-continent, Latin America, the Pacific area, and the continent of Africa. Since the announcement made by the Guardian in his Ridván Message of 1957, the number of centres in the Indian sub-continent has almost doubled. In Latin America, the gain has been even more striking, from approximately a hundred and thirty to almost three hundred and sixty, a truly remarkable achievement in so short a space of time, and one contributing significantly to the fulfilment of the goal of a National

Assembly in every republic of Central and South America. Throughout the Pacific region there has been an increase of more than three hundred centres in a four-year period, testifying to those spiritual potentialities mentioned in Shoghi Effendi's frequent references to the establishment and spread of the Faith in the countries of the Asiatic mainland and the islands of the Pacific. The total of more than fifteen hundred centres in Africa reflects the addition of nearly one thousand localities since 1957 when he so proudly announced in his last Ridván Message that the total had reached a level of more than five hundred and fifty.

After the formation during the current Ridván period of twenty-one National Spiritual Assemblies in Latin America, a total of forty-eight National and Regional Assemblies will be functioning throughout the Bahá'í world as the supreme, divinely-ordained administrative institutions of their respective countries and areas.

The total number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, the foundation upon which the entire Bahá'í administrative structure rests, is now nearly one thousand eight hundred and fifty, an increase of three hundred and eighty-five over the number reported in last year's Convention Message, and a further substantial increase will occur this year, as the fruit of the stupendous efforts exerted in all the continents of the globe to fulfil both the original and the supplementary goals of the Ten Year Plan. Two hundred and sixty-five of these local bodies are now incorporated, an objective to which the beloved Guardian attached great importance. Nearly twenty new registrations were secured during the past year, chiefly in the Western Hemisphere, in regions as widespread as Alaska, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Peru, and Chile. The incorporation of the four Brazilian Assemblies of Curitiba, São Caetano, Campinas and Niterói in one year, bringing the total in that country to eight, as well as the registration of the Local Assembly of Chiclayo, Peru, represent particularly significant victories, as both Brazil and Peru now have the unique distinction of being the first sovereign countries in the Bahá'í world to attain the goal of incorporation of every one of the Local Spiritual Assemblies within their borders. Another notable achievement of the past year was the incorporation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Victoria, British Cameroons, the first in this region of West Africa, and one

which undoubtedly will open the way for legal recognition of the Faith in other countries and dependencies of that important area.

The goal of translating the literature of the Faith into the indigenous languages of the territories included in the Ten Year Plan has, in most cases, been accomplished, and the supplemental achievements in this important field have exceeded all expectations. Since the inauguration of the Crusade translations have been completed in no less than one hundred and eighty-four different languages, eighty-one of which represent original or revised objectives, and the remaining one hundred and three supplementary achievements. All of the goals for translation have been fulfilled in the languages specified for Europe and the Americas, and nearly all of those for Africa; only ten in Asia remain to be completed. Including those already in existence before the opening of the Crusade, Bahá'í literature has now been translated into two hundred and seventy-three different languages, one hundred and twenty-five of these since the passing of the beloved Guardian.

The Ten Year Plan called for the acquisition of eleven sites for future Bahá'í Houses of Worship. Most of these were purchased in the early years of the Crusade, the last one having been added in 1958. Acquisition of Temple sites was also an objective of many of the supplementary plans given to various National and Regional Assemblies. Including the original eleven, no less than forty such sites have now been acquired, among these plots in all but two of the twenty republics of Latin America, foreshadowing the day when peoples in all the continents and major areas of the world can assemble for worship under the dome of future Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs.

Recognition of the independent character of the Faith by civil authorities, an objective constantly urged upon the friends by the beloved Guardian, has been further advanced during the past year through the action of school officials in twelve additional cities of the United States giving recognition to the Bahá'í Holy Days. Over ninety jurisdictions throughout the world now grant the Faith this form of recognition. During the past year the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate has been legalized in Louisiana in the United States,

bringing to twenty-nine the number of states and federal districts in that country which recognize the right of Bahá'í Assemblies to conduct legal marriage ceremonies.

The extraordinary increase in the number of Bahá'í summer schools, winter schools, week-end schools, teaching conferences and congresses throughout the Bahá'í world, in both the East and the West, precludes detailed enumeration at this time, but bears witness to the greatly increased community activity of the believers and the range of that phase of their teaching efforts, aimed at deepening the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in their knowledge and understanding of His Faith. Also of significance has been the increase of endowments, a number of which have been contributed by devoted, newly-enrolled African believers who have, out of their meagre holdings, insisted on donating land for local Hazíratu'l-Quds and schools.

In reviewing the extraordinary progress which has been made in achieving so many objectives of the Ten Year Plan, sufficient tribute could never be paid to the services rendered by the followers of the Faith in Bahá'u'lláh's native land. This oldest community in the Bahá'í world, from whose ranks its early saints, heroes and martyrs were drawn, has poured forth its substance, and an army of pioneers, in a steadily mounting stream for the support of every undertaking embarked upon in every continent of the globe.

The eighth year of the world-embracing Crusade now drawing to a close has witnessed an unprecedented movement of pioneers from both Persia and America into the goal cities of Europe, paralleling and indeed surpassing that which occurred in Latin America in the months preceding the great victory won in that region last Ridván. This stupendous effort, the first of its kind to join the two foremost communities of the Bahá'í world in an international undertaking of such transcendent importance has, through the operation of the Joint Deputization Fund and the settlement of pioneers, assured the formation of the requisite number of Local Assemblies specified by the beloved Guardian as objectives of the home-front campaigns in the goal countries of the European continent, aimed at quadrupling the number of Local Assemblies existing at the beginning of the

Crusade—the highest objective set by him for any home front in the Bahá'í World Community.

This glorious victory represents a significant milestone in that “fate laden” process set in motion by the beloved Guardian in 1946 when he made “the initiation of systematic teaching activity in war-torn, spiritually famished European continent” a primary objective of the second Seven Year Plan launched in that year, and which constituted the second stage in the unfoldment of the world mission given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the American believers. In calling for a vanguard of pioneers to inaugurate the “spiritual conquest of the old world”, he looked forward to the time when, “in the years to come”, a host of Bahá'u'lláh's standard-bearers would “spiritually raise up the sorely ravaged continent of Europe.” This confident hope of our beloved Guardian will become a reality this Riḍván when, as the fruit of the labours of this host of pioneers, the foundations for eleven future pillars of the Universal House of Justice will be laid, paving the way for the establishment of these divinely ordained institutions in the Riḍván period of 1962.

The evolution of the World Centre of the Faith so often alluded to by the beloved Guardian in his references to the rise and development of the institutions functioning in the Holy Land, will enter another stage this Riḍván when the International Bahá'í Council, the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice, will be transformed into a duly elected body. This highly significant event, the first international election in Bahá'í history, has placed upon the members of the National and Regional Assemblies formed last Riḍván the obligation of participating in the election of a body to whose membership believers in every part of the world are eligible.

The process of erecting a Bahá'í House of Worship in each of the five continents of the globe, a task of far-reaching spiritual significance and one to which the beloved Guardian attached immense importance, may be said to have entered its final stage with the opening in Kampala, Uganda, of the completed Mother Temple of Africa last January, the contemplated dedication of the Mother Temple of the Antipodes in Sydney, Australia next September, and

the laying of the corner-stone of the Mother Temple of Europe in Frankfurt, Germany last November. No one could have foreseen, when the vast panorama of the World Crusade was spread before our eyes in 1953, that in the eighth year of its prosecution Africa would snatch the palm of victory in yet another field.

The beautiful and dignified African Temple, enthroned like a queen on Kikaya Hill, overlooking the City of Kampala and the rolling green countryside, seems to emanate a warm and personal welcome to all who behold it, and is already demonstrating the truth of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words that these Temples are great silent teachers of the Faith. On the day of its dedication the words of Bahá’u’lláh, recited in Persian, Arabic, many African languages and English, flowed over the assembled believers from East Africa, Abyssinia, Eritrea, Rhodesia, Ruanda-Urundi, South Africa, the Sudan, Arabia, Persia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the United States and other places, in mighty waves of benediction, lifting all hearts in praise of Him, and filling the souls of the friends with awe at the contemplation of the bounties of God poured forth in this Day of Days in such supreme abundance. On the day following this profound experience of Bahá’í fellowship, the Temple was formally opened to the public for worship; the crowds, representative of not only the African peoples, but of European, Indian, Sikh, and other elements in the population, filled the Temple to its open doors and overflowed onto its surrounding terrace, an attentive, colourful and reverent throng united, for perhaps the first time, in a service of worship dedicated to the oneness of mankind, to the establishment of world peace and the creation of a society founded on the brotherhood of all men and the fatherhood of their common Creator.

The blessings which this Mashriqu’l-Adhkár is now releasing in the heart of what once was termed the “dark continent” but which now may be truly said to have become the “bright continent” are indeed incalculable. Already similar blessings are beginning to flow out from the first Bahá’í House of Worship to be erected in the Southern Hemisphere, where thousands of people, in, anticipation of its forthcoming dedication, are visiting the Sydney Temple, receiving literature, asking questions and broadcasting news of the progress of Bahá’í activities throughout Australia.

There remains the construction, in the centre of that continent which is the cradle of western civilization, amongst peoples highly gifted but sorely disillusioned, often hopeless and cynical through direct experience of two cataclysmic wars, of the third great House of Worship which Shoghi Effendi called upon us to erect during this period of unparalleled expansion in all fields of Bahá'í activity. We have witnessed how far-reaching has been the effect of the completion in the heart of America of that most holy Temple dedicated by the Centre of the Covenant Himself; we now see before our eyes the new and powerful teaching influence which the African and Australian Temples are releasing. We cannot for a moment contemplate depriving the European continent and its spiritually famished multitudes of a similar blessing. A supreme effort is required, however, if we are to accomplish this purpose. The fanatical and calculated opposition of certain ecclesiastical elements in Germany has delayed, until the eighth year of the World Crusade, purchase of a site for and permission to build a Bahá'í House of Worship there. At long last the work has commenced, and there are bright prospects for the speedy erection of this building, whose design was approved by the beloved Guardian himself and for the support of which he urged the entire Bahá'í world to rally its forces. Unfortunately, the steady rise in prices in Europe, and particularly in Germany, since the passing of the Guardian, will now entail a tremendous increase in cost. This, as well as the maintenance abroad of that precious corps of pioneers in Latin America and Europe, whose steadfast and devoted services are the buttress of the newly elected Local Assemblies upon which the future pillars of the Universal House of Justice must rest, as well as the support of the various activities which are the mainstay of the mass conversion beginning at long last to take place will, if we are to meet our obligations and achieve our goals, require on the part of every single believer, whatever his or her personal circumstances, whether in the East or the West, a tremendous and unprecedented degree of self-sacrifice in the support of the various funds, the bedrock upon which all Bahá'í activity inevitably rests. Face to face with the gravity of our present obligations, we must never for a moment lose heart. We have never failed. Our record is unblemished. Miraculously, at the last hour, battles greater and more critical in the fortunes of our Faith have been won.

That the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, the “priceless gem of Divine Revelation enshrining”, as the Guardian wrote, “the Spirit of God and incarnating His Purpose for mankind in this age”, “feeds itself upon . . . hidden springs of celestial strength” and “propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind” is, in every field of Bahá'í activity, being constantly demonstrated, but perhaps in no field as clearly as that of the teaching work. The vast process of mass conversion, in fulfilment of Shoghi Effendi's expressed wish that during this fourth phase of the Ten Year Plan “an unprecedented increase in the number of avowed supporters of the Faith, in all the continents of the globe, of every race, clime, creed and colour, should take place, is beginning to yield its first fruits.

Little wonder that these fruits are, for the most part, being garnered in lands and amongst peoples who have retained, he said, their “primitive simplicity and remained uncontaminated by the evils of a gross, a rampant and cancerous materialism undermining the fabric of human society alike in the East and in the West, eating into the vitals of the conflicting peoples and races inhabiting the American, the European and the Asiatic continents, and alas threatening to engulf in one common catastrophic convulsion the generality of mankind.”

In a little over a decade the ranks of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the African continent—now representing no less than two hundred and eighty-six tribes—have swelled to twenty thousand, ten thousand alone having been added since the passing of the beloved Guardian in 1957. “The pure-hearted and the spiritually receptive Negro race” which, he testified, was “so dearly loved by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, for whose conversion to His Father's Faith He so deeply yearned”, is now beginning to take its rightful place in the Bahá'í world; already seven national and regional bodies are representative of areas where the majority of the electorate belong to this distinguished race. The possibilities for an unprecedented enrolment of new believers in these areas are practically limitless, particularly in the African continent, and may be said to be solely dependent on a wider dispersal of Bahá'í pioneers and teachers and the provision of the necessary financial assistance in support of plans that are already formulated and only held in abeyance through lack of sufficient man-power and means.

Concomitant with the remarkable advances made in Africa, the Pacific region, upon which the Guardian lavished so much praise and encouragement during the last years of his life, and of whose newly-won victories he was so immensely proud, is witnessing a comparable expansion amongst the many peoples scattered throughout its islands and peninsulas who are as yet unspoiled by the blighting winds of Western materialism. In the Island of Mentawai alone there are now over five thousand Bahá'ís whilst in the entire Southeast Asian area the number of the adherents of the Faith has swelled to well over eight thousand. Throughout the islands of the Pacific Ocean the far-flung Bahá'í communities are rapidly expanding and steadily increasing numbers of their varied races are being enrolled under the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. In the Indian subcontinent, one of the earliest regions to receive His Message during His Own lifetime, a wave of conversion is spreading amongst some of its more primitive people in the Madhya Pradesh area, over five hundred of whom have embraced the Cause during the last few months.

In conjunction with the extraordinary progress which has taken place in the spread and consolidation of the Faith throughout the Western Hemisphere during the last few years, a less conspicuous but equally important advance can be seen in a field to which both the Master and the Guardian attached the highest significance. Almost half a century ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructed the believers in the United States and Canada to “*attach great importance to the . . . original inhabitants of America*”, promising that the Indians, like the original inhabitants of Arabia who accepted and supported Muhammad would, when educated and guided, “*become so enlightened that the whole earth will be illumined.*” The nineteenth objective of that portion of the World Crusade entrusted in 1953 to the American Bahá'í Community by its Guardian was the “conversion to the Faith of members of the leading Indian tribes.” At a steadily accelerating pace this immensely significant process of conversion has gone on until at the present time we are witnesses of an event of extraordinary historic importance, the election in Bolivia of a National Bahá'í Assembly representative of a community the vast majority of whom belong to the Aymara race. No less than thirteen hundred of these Indians, in over one hundred localities have, with enthusiasm and conviction, embraced the Faith and are responsible for the formation during this present Ridván of

over twenty Local Assemblies, thus directly fulfilling the expressed wish of the Guardian that the Indians be elected to the councils of the Faith and lend their support to its administrative activities.

The establishment of Indian Assemblies in Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico—areas which were the scene of such mighty pre-Colombian civilizations as those of the Incas, the Mayas, and the Aztecs; the formation of no less than four Assemblies representative of Canadian Indians in the Yukon, Alberta and Saskatchewan; the fact that there are now over forty Indian and Eskimo tribes represented in the Bahá'í Community throughout the Western Hemisphere—more than double the number in 1957—all testify that the devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh, in both the East and the West, are mindful of the tremendously significant words of their beloved Guardian at the inception of the World Crusade, and are devoting special attention to the teaching work in these infinitely fertile fields.

At the moment when such great victories have been won, when such significant events are taking place, when the Ten Year Plan, the detailed, unique and precious Plan of Shoghi Effendi embodying his fondest hopes, and setting forth so clearly those tasks the accomplishment of which in their entirety must constitute the rock foundation of the work to come for generations, is drawing to a close—at such a moment we should pause and weigh once again the implications of those words he addressed to the first Intercontinental Teaching Conference held in Africa at the opening of the World Crusade: “I welcome”, he said, “with open arms the unexpectedly large number of the representatives of the pure-hearted and the spiritually receptive Negro race . . . I acclaim the preponderance of the members of this same race at so significant a Conference . . . auguring well for a corresponding multiplication in the number of the representatives of the yellow, the red and brown races of mankind dwelling respectively in the Far East, in the Far West and in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean, a multiplication designed ultimately to bring to a proper equipoise the divers ethnic elements comprised within the highly diversified world-embracing Bahá'í fellowship.”

There can be no doubt that one of the deepest sources of satisfaction to the heart of our beloved Guardian during the closing years of his life was the remarkable progress being made in carrying the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to the members of these races. Their enrolment as Bahá'ís however, was far from being his ultimate goal. He desired their "active participation in the administration of the affairs of Bahá'í communities." This desire of his is now being rapidly fulfilled all over the world.

Significant as these other plans and considerations may be, there was a dream of the future in Shoghi Effendi's mind, a vision of things to come. This Crusade, he pointed out at its very inception, has been launched "for the systematic propagation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh over the surface of the entire planet . . ." "It must, as it approaches its climax, carry the torch of the Faith to regions so remote, so backward, so inhospitable that neither the light of Christianity or Islam has, after the revolution of centuries, as yet penetrated." Already in Africa, in the Pacific, and in the Americas, the first attacks on these remote outposts of paganism have been made and members of tribes as yet unconverted to any of the great living religions of the world have accepted, with steadfast and illumined hearts, the regenerating truths enshrined in the Revelation of God for this Day. But beyond all this there were still heights and depths of service not yet attained, shining prizes within our reach, which Shoghi Effendi longed for us to seize, to which his eyes travelled with yearning and hope as he gazed upon the vision of our future. To all his "dearly loved . . . onward marching legions of the army of Bahá'u'lláh—whether they laboured beyond the Arctic Circle, in the torrid zones of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, on the borders or in the heart of the jungles of Burma, Malaya, India or the Amazon, on the fringes of the African and Arabian deserts, in the lonely islands dotting the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans or the North Sea, whether they scaled the mountains of Tibet, penetrated the interior of China, Mongolia and Japan, sat with the leper, consorted with the outcast, traversed the steppes of Russia or the wastes of Siberia—"I direct", he wrote, "my impassioned appeal to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts, and prepare for that Day of Days when His victorious battalions will, to the accompaniment of hosannas from the invisible angels in the Abhá Kingdom, celebrate the hour of final victory."

The brilliant plans, the daring campaigns, initiated by the Guardian during the thirty-six years of his ministry to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have borne fruit, during the eighth year of his World Crusade, in a manner and to a degree the staunchest believer would never have dreamed possible during that dark and fateful period associated with his passing. Great, however, as our present victories are, we must never for a moment lose sight of the fact that the crown of so much labour, and sacrifice will elude our grasp if the remaining objectives of the Ten Year Plan are not achieved and the prizes already won are not safeguarded during the two years that lie ahead of us.

The consolidation of the various home fronts, a task of such fundamental importance that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Himself repeatedly stressed it as early as 1916 in His Tablets of the Divine Plan, must receive the special attention of all national bodies, whether presently or previously formed, throughout the entire Bahá'í world, for the home fronts, and primarily the formation of the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies specified by the Guardian himself for each one of them, are the bedrock upon which rest those pillars which must, at the end of the Crusade, sustain the weight of the Universal House of Justice itself. The Crusade "must," he wrote, "as it approaches its conclusion, pave the way for the laying, on an unassailable foundation, of the structural basis of an Administrative Order whose fabric must, in the course of successive Crusades, be laboriously erected throughout the entire globe . . ."

The process of carrying the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all the peoples of the world must be accelerated, for He Himself ordained teaching as one of the primary duties of every single one of His followers. When broken in strength and advanced in years 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in those Tablets which constitute the Charter of teaching activities for centuries to come, recalled in most touching terms His own labours to spread the Faith of His Father and warned the believers against the vanity of all other preoccupations. *"You have observed", He wrote, "that while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the utmost bodily weakness and feebleness, while He was indisposed, and had not the power to move . . . He travelled through many countries . . ."* *"What result", He asked, "is forthcoming from material rest, tranquillity, luxury and attachment to this corporeal world! It is evident that the man who*

pursues these things will in the end become afflicted with regret and loss.”

Shoghi Effendi pointed out to us, at the very inception of the Crusade, that the prosecution of all the other vital tasks he had enumerated as objectives of his world-embracing Plan, would “fail to achieve their supreme purpose if not supplemented by the equally vital task . . . of winning to the Faith fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts, Whose reinforcing strength is so essential to the safeguarding of the victories which the band of heroic Bahá’í conquerors are winning in the course of their several campaigns in all continents of the globe.”

No words could better direct the attention of the friends to the significance of the immediate three-fold task that confronts the entire Bahá’í world—the consolidation of the home fronts, the process of mass conversion and the rearing of the Mother Temple of Europe—than these written by our beloved Guardian himself long ago, on another occasion, but in words so pregnant with meaning for this hour in which we find ourselves that they seem to have been written yesterday: “Ours is the duty to fix our gaze with undeviating attention on the duties and responsibilities confronting us at this present hour, to concentrate our resources, both material and spiritual, on the tasks that lie immediately ahead, to ensure that no time is wasted, that no opportunity is missed, that no obligation is evaded, that no task is half-heartedly performed, that no decision is procrastinated. The task summoning us to a challenge, unprecedented in its gravity and force, is too vast and sacred, the time too short, the hour too perilous, the workers too few, the call too insistent, the resources too inadequate, for us to allow these precious and fleeting hours to slip from our grasp, and to suffer the prizes within our reach to be endangered or forfeited. So much depends upon us, so pregnant with possibilities is the present stage in the evolution of the Plan, that great and small, individuals, groups and Assemblies, white and coloured, young and old, neophytes and veterans, settlers, pioneers, itinerant teachers and administrators, as isolated believers, as organizers of groups, and as contributors to the formation of Local or National Assemblies, as builders of the Temple . . . all, without exception and in every sphere of activity, however modest, restricted, or inconspicuous, must

participate and labour, assiduously and continually, until every ounce of our energy is spent, until, tired but blissful, our promised harvest is brought in, and our pledge to our Beloved fully redeemed.”

HANDS OF THE CAUSE IN THE HOLY LAND

Message of the Custodians to the 21 new National Spiritual Assemblies of Latin America; Riḍván, 1961

To the Hands of the Cause, Auxiliary Board Members,
Representatives of National Assemblies, Delegates and Believers
Gathered During Riḍván 118, at the Historic Conventions for the
Election of Independent National Spiritual Assemblies in the
Following Countries:

Argentina

Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Dominican Republic

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Haiti

Honduras

Jamaica

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Uruguay

Venezuela

Beloved Friends:

On the glorious and historic occasion of the formation of no less than 21 independent National Spiritual Assemblies throughout Latin America let us lift up our hearts in praise to Bahá'u'lláh for the blessings He has poured forth so abundantly on the labours of His servants and for the fruition of yet another cherished plan of our beloved Guardian.

It is now almost ninety years since Bahá'u'lláh in the Mother Book of His Revelation, raised His "*clarion call*", addressed collectively to the rulers of the Republics of the Western Hemisphere, and summoned them to take "*advantage of the Day of God*" From the moment when the Supreme Manifestation poured forth His bounties upon the Western Hemisphere until this auspicious day when no less than 24 independent national Bahá'í bodies, stretching from Alaska to Chile, have been constituted, the New World has received a never-ending stream of blessings from on High.

Before we look to the future of the work in Latin America we would do well to cast a glance over the past and remember the exploits that have led up to this present hour of consummation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, planted the seed of victory when He called upon the believers to make every effort "*so that those Republics may become so illumined with the splendours and the effulgences of the Sun of Reality that they may become the objects of the praise and commendation of all other countries*" Already, during His Own lifetime, a few consecrated souls, among them she whom the Guardian characterized as "that star servant of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, the incomparable Martha Root" had visited some of the Latin American republics and begun to teach there. However, it was not until the inauguration by the beloved Guardian in 1937 of the first "Seven Year Plan", the object of which, as he wrote, was "the establishment of a minimum of one Bahá'í centre in each of the Republics of Middle and South America" . . . "for whose entry into the fellowship of Bahá'u'lláh the Plan was primarily formulated", that the few isolated Bahá'ís scattered throughout that vast area were reinforced in their labours by an official and systematic campaign conducted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada under the direct guidance of Shoghi Effendi himself. In 1938 he called upon the friends to "launch an offensive against the powers of darkness, of corruption, and of ignorance, an offensive that must extend to the uttermost end of the Southern continent, and embrace within its scope each of the twenty nations that compose it". By 1944, the end of the first Seven Year Plan, which coincided with the glorious first centenary of the inception of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, the devoted band of North American pioneers now reinforced by many new native Bahá'ís had succeeded in establishing no less than fifteen Spiritual Assemblies in

the Republics of Central and South America, and in forming groups in the remaining five.

These early victories so stirred the heart of the beloved Guardian that he said the opening of Latin America would “come to be regarded as one of the most glorious chapters in the international history of their Faith”. By 1947, soon after the second Seven Year Plan was launched at his instruction, the Centres in Latin America had grown to over a hundred and the Assemblies had reached thirty-seven, an increase of twenty-two in a three-year period. One of the most “vital objectives”, to use his own words, of this second Seven Year Plan, was the formation of two Latin American National Assemblies, one to be representative of the believers of Central and the other of South America. Fourteen years ago the beloved Guardian heralded those two bodies as “precursors of the institutions which must participate in the election, and contribute to the support, of the Universal House of Justice”, and stated their function was to lead to the constitution of a “properly elected, fully representative National Assembly” in each republic of Central and South America. This, he said, would constitute the last stage in the administrative evolution of the Faith in Latin America.

The victories achieved during the first Seven Year Plan, the remarkable progress made during the interim before the second Seven Year Plan was launched, so rejoiced the heart of the beloved Guardian that he lifted up his voice and testified—in words that must forever be a crown upon the heads of the Bahá’ís of all Latin America—to the greatness of their achievements. “No Community”, he wrote, “since the inception of the hundred-year-old Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not even the community of the Most Great Name in the North American continent, can boast of an evolution as rapid, a consolidation as sound, a multiplication of centres as swift, as those that have marked the birth and rise of the community of His followers in Latin America”, a Community he called “this privileged, this youngest, this dynamic and highly promising member of the organic Bahá’í World Community”. His love flowed out to them in a mighty wave, in glowing words he welcomed that Community into full partnership in the affairs of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and asserted that “. . . the eager, the warm-hearted, the spiritually minded and staunch

members of these Latin American Bahá'í communities . . .” were now “launched on their crusade for the spiritual conquest of the whole planet . . .”

With the release of the stupendous program of the World Crusade in Ridván 1953, the destiny of the Latin American Republics became clear. Magnificent, staggering—a youthful Community gazed in awe at the tasks allotted it! Fourteen virgin territories became its responsibility to open to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in a ten-year period, territories most of the Bahá'ís of the world had never heard of and whose location was a mystery to them! Twenty national Bahá'í headquarters were to be established in the twenty capital cities of Latin America and two sites for future Bahá'í Temples were to be purchased. The two recently formed National Assemblies responsible for the work in these twenty countries must have asked themselves how such feats could ever be accomplished by the new Assemblies, the struggling groups, the scattered isolated believers under their jurisdiction. Other projects were added to these, either in the original Crusade Plan or at a later date. The worthiness of the new Latin American Community, which had now taken its rightful place in the Bahá'í world, was soon demonstrated. With the never-failing help of its devoted and loving Mother Community in North America, it shouldered its sacred burdens, clung tenaciously to the precious work entrusted to it by its Guardian, and forged ahead from victory to victory. He had called upon it in 1947 to “rise to the heights of the glorious opportunity which destiny is unfolding before its members”. It arose, and so nobly did the Latin American Bahá'ís fulfil their trust that in 1955 the Guardian announced to the Bahá'í world that in 1957 he would increase the number of National Assemblies responsible for the work throughout that area to four, dividing Central and South America, respectively, into two Regions, thus facilitating the administration of the rapidly expanding work in each area. Fresh bounties and new evidences of the high regard in which the Guardian held these believers in the Latin countries of the New World were steadily forthcoming up until the very end of his life. He urged them, as supplementary goals, to secure a Bahá'í endowment in each Republic and a Bahá'í Temple site in the eighteen countries without one. He indicated that Jamaica would form a National Assembly of its own by including her in the roll call of delegates to one of the last Conventions held before his passing. In numerous Messages to the

Bahá'í world, to Assemblies and individuals, he praised the devotion of the believers, extolled their services, listed their victories, and painted a glowing picture of their future.

In less than a quarter of a century the seeds so widely sown have yielded the harvest being reaped today in the name of Shoghi Effendi according to the provisions of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and through the mighty spiritual impetus imparted by Bahá'u'lláh. The event the entire Bahá'í world, in this blessed Ridván period, is celebrating, is of a nature unequalled in the annals of our Faith. Twenty-one countries are at one and the same time reaching the last stage of their administrative evolution through the election of their independent National Assemblies. That vast area, "an area", as Shoghi Effendi was wont to say, "extending from the southern confines of the Great Republic of the West to the extremity of Chile", has now come of age in the conduct of its affairs. The pillars which must assist in bearing the weight of the Universal House of Justice so soon to be constituted, have been safely erected.

At this breath-taking moment of fulfilment, before plunging into the great work that lies ahead of them, it is essential that these Communities, and above all the members of their newly-elected National Assemblies, take stock of their present position and survey the tasks still to be accomplished, tasks clearly set forth by the Guardian himself. As these new national Bahá'í communities face the future they should, we feel, above all else, remember, cherish and foster the unity of purpose and spirit which has consistently characterized their growth and which was so carefully inculcated in them by Shoghi Effendi himself. We cannot urge upon the believers too strongly the necessity of maintaining this supranational quality of Bahá'í life regardless of the new-found independence of their national communities. The close and loving cooperation which has existed between different Latin American Communities in the field of teaching and publications should continue in order to consolidate the work already initiated and economize the very limited funds of the Faith available for Bahá'í literature, as well as to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and ensure a uniform and high standard in the matter of translations.

Our beloved Guardian, on various occasions, set many specific goals for Latin America, particularly in the subsidiary Six Year Plans given to the four Regional Assemblies formed in 1957. The believers and their newly elected national representatives must now keep these goals constantly before them, and exert the utmost effort to assure their accomplishment.

The Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups and isolated centres which have, at the cost of so much self-sacrifice and devotion on the part of both native and foreign pioneers, been raised to, and in some cases have even surpassed, the number specified by the beloved Guardian, must be safeguarded at any price during the coming years and, indeed, multiplied. The consolidation of the home fronts, and the preservation of the precious goals so laboriously won, must be regarded as a paramount duty at this critical period which inevitably follows the birth of any new national community. Each National Assembly must bear in mind that the foundation of Local Assemblies upon which it rests constitutes, however indirectly, the foundation of the Universal House of Justice itself, and that the pillars of this mighty institution must under no circumstances be weakened at the very moment when the dome is about to be placed upon them.

The separate incorporation of each new National Assembly, as well as all firmly grounded Local Assemblies, is likewise an important phase of the work to be undertaken in each of the Republics, and in Jamaica, and constitutes one of the most fundamental ways of consolidating the tasks already carried forward during twenty-four years in such a remarkable manner. Likewise, every effort should be made to win recognition for the Bahá'í Holy Days on which work is suspended and to secure permission to perform Bahá'í marriages legally.

The beloved Guardian, in a momentous communication addressed jointly to the National Assemblies of Central and South America in 1951, listed "the consolidation of the recently inaugurated national and local Funds" as one of the foremost responsibilities of these newly-formed regional administrative bodies. During the remaining months of the World Crusade when the financial requirements for

attaining total victory are so great, the friends must be made aware of the need for a steady and continuous flow of contributions to their National Funds, an outpouring which the beloved Guardian characterized as “the life-blood of those nascent institutions” The spiritual significance and blessing of voluntary giving in support of Bahá’í activities should be strongly emphasized by the new National Assemblies as they acquaint the members of their communities with the obligations which they must now discharge.

The emphasis placed by Shoghi Effendi on the importance of ensuring the wide dissemination of properly translated books on the Faith, as well as on the holding of an increasing number of regular summer schools and regional conferences, must never be forgotten and every effort should be made to implement his instructions given as long ago as 1947. “Other agencies,” he wrote, “such as publicity and advertising in the press, the multiplication of accurate and improved radio scripts, the extension of teaching projects through regional teaching committees, visual education and the organization of public meetings, should be fully utilized to capture the attention, win the sympathy, and secure the active and unreserved support of a steadily increasing proportion of the population of the various Latin American republics”.

Of the precious new territories given at the beginning of the Ten Year Plan to the two National Spiritual Assemblies of Central and South America, two of which were subdivided by the Guardian himself at a later date, those still assigned to the Latin American regional bodies, as well as the consolidation areas allotted to these same Assemblies, must continue to be the responsibility of the believers and their elected representatives, at least until the globe-encircling Crusade ends in 1963. After carefully considering the geographical relationship of these territories, now numbering twenty, as well as other factors, we have reapportioned them among the new national bodies as follows:

To Chile, the three goals of Chiloé, Juan Fernandez, and Easter Islands; to Brazil, the six goals of British and French Guiana, Surinam, and the Islands of Trinidad, Barbados and Grenada; whilst

Venezuela has been allocated the two goals of Curacao and Margarita. Panama, Guatemala, Ecuador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic have each been apportioned one goal, respectively, as follows: Tuamotu Archipelago, British Honduras, Galapagos, Martinique, and the Virgin Islands. Jamaica, the only territory outside the twenty Latin American countries to achieve the status of an independent national community at this time, will be responsible for the four goals of the Bahamas, Bermuda, Antigua and St. Lucia.

Last but not least of the great responsibilities now laid squarely upon the shoulders of not only the elected representatives of these new national Bahá'í communities but upon the rank and file of the believers of all twenty-one countries, is the teaching work in that area, where as the Guardian wrote, "the first fruits of the Divine Plan . . . have already been garnered in such abundance", and which he characterized as "the vital process of individual conversion".

Bahá'u'lláh has, in numerous Tablets, made teaching the paramount spiritual obligation of every single believer. The whole purpose of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan is to teach the Faith of His Father to all the peoples of the world. As long ago as the time when the first Seven Year Plan was given to the Bahá'ís of North America by the beloved Guardian, he pointed out to them that the purpose for which they had so laboriously erected the administrative machinery of their Faith was to teach, and that now they must arise and use this instrument for this supreme purpose—the propagation of their Faith. On the occasion of the half-way point of the World Crusade, in the last Message the Bahá'í world was ever to receive from him, he associated the coming five years with mass conversion.

Now is the auspicious moment for the members of these new national communities "whose motherlands have been chosen", as Shoghi Effendi wrote, "as the scene of the earliest victories won by the prosecutors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan"—to arise and teach as never before. Let them recall the wonderful appeal the Guardian addressed to them: "Theirs is the opportunity, if they but seize it, to adorn the opening pages of the annals of the second Bahá'í century with a tale of deeds approaching in valour those with which their Persian brethren have illuminated the opening years of the first, and comparable with the exploits more recently achieved by their North

American fellow-believers, and which have shed such lustre on the closing decade of that same century.” These communities have now entered the period of “strenuous and organized labours” the Guardian spoke of, “by which future generations of believers in the Latin countries must distinguish themselves” in that period when, as he said, 66 native Latin American travelling teachers” will arise “who, as the mighty task progresses, must increasingly bear the brunt of responsibility for the propagation of the Faith in their homelands.”

A bright picture stretches before the eyes of the believers in the New World and the harvest, in many places, stands ready for the garner’s hand. The greatest possibilities for mass conversion at the present time are undoubtedly amongst the Indian tribes. As long ago as 1947 the Guardian wrote that particular attention should be directed to the “various Indian tribes, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Latin republics, whom the Author of the Tablets of the Divine Plan has compared to the ‘ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula’ ”. He then quoted the wonderful words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding them: “Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For these souls may be likened unto the ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, who, prior to the Mission of Muhammad, were like unto savages. When the light of Muhammad shone forth in their midst, however, they became so radiant as to illumine the world. Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.”

How grateful all those believers must be who were in any way responsible for the beginning of this process of mass conversion among the Indians, which had already started during the lifetime of the beloved Guardian. What joy it brought him, with what enthusiasm he hailed the formation of the first all-Indian Local Assembly, how dear to his heart was the first Indian Institute at Chichicastenango, how frequently he spoke to pilgrims from East and West of the importance of this work and the progress it was making, and how carefully he noted in his records the names of the tribes enrolled in the Faith and the native languages into which Bahá’í literature had been translated. In his own words he clearly indicated for the believers of Latin America the manner in which he wished them to

proceed in this all-important teaching field and clearly set forth the role he wished the new Indian Bahá'ís to play in both the administrative and teaching work of the Faith. "A special effort should be exerted to secure the unqualified adherence of members of some of these tribes to the Faith, their subsequent election to its councils, and their unreserved support of the organized attempts that will have to be made in the future by the projected National Assemblies for the large-scale conversion of Indian races to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh."

The duties devolving upon the newly elected National Assemblies and the communities they represent are manifold and arduous. The possibilities which lie before them are infinitely promising. Within this area, which has now come of age in the administration of its own affairs, there are black republics and white republics. Within at least one of these the majority of the believers are descended from the original inhabitants of the Americas. What a glorious demonstration of the oneness of mankind! What an opportunity these favoured new national communities have of exemplifying the reality of that brotherhood of man Bahá'u'lláh has asserted as the cardinal principle of His Faith!

No words could breathe more hope and confidence into the hearts of the believers in that favoured portion of the globe than those addressed to them by the beloved Guardian himself during the last year of his life: "May these communities, now standing on the threshold of unprecedented achievements, which have already, through their collective endeavours, ennobled the record of Bahá'í accomplishments during the last twenty years of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, who are so notably contributing, through their divers national characteristics, to the enrichment of the life of the International Bahá'í Community, be vouchsafed a still fuller measure of celestial strength, that will enable them to fulfil their high destiny in the years to come, and play their part in hastening the world-wide triumph of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and the firm establishment of its embryonic World Order."

April 1962

To Annual Bahá'í Conventions,

Beloved Friends:

As we stand on the threshold of that year which must culminate in the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, the termination of the mightiest Spiritual Crusade in the history of mankind, the election of the Supreme Legislative Body of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and the convocation of the first World Congress to be held by the followers of the Most Great Name, it behoves us, while there is yet time, to not only take stock of our precious and numerous victories but also to correctly assess the work still to be accomplished if we are to prove faithful to the priceless trust left in our hands by our beloved Guardian. The sands of time are swiftly running out; days and weeks will soon have slipped from our grasp forever; days in which we might have added one more victory to those already adorning the pages of the nine most momentous years in the Formative Age of our glorious Faith. Before the last lap of our race against time is run we may well pause for a moment of prayerful consideration, each one questioning himself as to where his duty lies, communing in his heart with the spirit of Shoghi Effendi, asking "Is there some special thing I can do?" before it is too late and the opportunity of a lifetime passes by forever.

The initial stage of that great victory, characterized by Shoghi Effendi as the "Spiritual Conquest of the Old World under a divinely conceived Plan", is taking place through the election this Ridván of national bodies in the ten original goal countries of the second Seven

Year Plan, as well as in Finland, which was added to their number, at the opening of the World Crusade, by the Guardian himself. The little short of miraculous achievement last year, on the part of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout Latin America, which enabled them to erect no less than twenty-one independent pillars of the Universal House of Justice on the firm foundation of the number of Local Assemblies Shoghi Effendi specified as necessary prerequisites for the accomplishment, of that historic act, has been duplicated one year later by their brethren in Europe, where the steadfast and unremitting labours of the European Bahá'ís, coupled with the self-sacrificing and consecrated activity of a host of pioneers from both the Cradle of the Administrative Order and the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth, have yielded an infinitely rich and promising harvest. The lamps of these great administrative institutions, which are destined in the course of time to become secondary Houses of Justices, are being lighted by the power released through the operation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, in land after land. In the Indian Ocean the latest of these mighty beacons is now being kindled through the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ceylon, swelling the ranks of those regional and national bodies girdling the entire world to no less than fifty-six, twenty-four in the Western Hemisphere and thirty-two in the Eastern Hemisphere. When we remember that in Ridván, 1953 the tally of National Assemblies was twelve, and contemplate the fact that in exactly nine years forty-four of these autonomous institutions have been added, we are staggered by the magnitude of the task accomplished by the little band of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. How well we know who led us and who inspired us to such deeds! How well we know whose promises and whose praises rallied our often failing strength, kept our feet in the path of service, strengthened our hearts and fanned our faith until we lay in homage at his beloved feet such a victory as this!

Upon the foundations laid by Shoghi Effendi, the Sign of God on earth "that shadoweth all mankind", the divine Animus that poured its force into the embryonic institutions existing at the time of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—He Who was the architect of Bahá'u'lláh's world-encircling Order—have now been reared those initial pillars which must sustain the weight of an Institution which has been promised, for the first time in the history of this planet, unerring guidance in the discharge of its specially ordained tasks.

From Chile to Alaska, from Britain to Japan, in the heart of the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, rising like a forest from the mainland of Asia, the Americas, Europe and Africa, the pillars of the Universal House of Justice now stand, waiting to receive, next Ridván, on the occasion of the first Jubilee Celebration of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic mission, their mighty Crown.

In view of the supreme importance of consolidating the foundations of the National and Regional Assemblies at so momentous a juncture in Bahá'í history, the Hands of the Faith have decided to permit the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies any time between Ridván, 1962 and Ridván, 1963, following the example of the beloved Guardian who introduced this measure during the crucial year preceding the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the inception of the Bahá'í Cycle in 1944. We feel sure this will greatly assist and encourage those hard-pressed national communities which, in such countries as Germany, England, the United States, Canada and Australia, have not yet won the all-important home-front goal of forming the number of Local Assemblies he specified as an essential part of the tasks entrusted to their care under the provisions of his Crusade. It will also be eagerly seized upon by other communities throughout the world as an opportunity to add to the trophies they themselves have already piled so high in the course of this Crusade and to vie with each other in an effort to achieve added distinction when the roll call of local victories is held at that joyous time when the entire Bahá'í world celebrates the Jubilee Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh.

Special consideration should be given at this time, by the believers everywhere, as well as their elected national representatives, to the World Bahá'í Congress, called by the beloved Guardian himself, which will be held in London, during the Ridván period of 1963, from April 28 to May 2, the first of its kind in the history of the Cause, and constituting one of the objectives of the Ten Year Plan at the World Centre of the Faith. It is hoped that on this unique occasion when, in every continent of the globe, in every hamlet and city where Bahá'ís reside, the friends will be celebrating the holiest festival of the Bahá'í calendar, commemorating the anniversary of the "formal assumption by Bahá'u'lláh of His Prophetic Office", which ushered

in the “king of days”, the “Day of God Himself”, believers from all parts of the world will gather together and voice their thanksgiving and praise for the guidance given this age by the Supreme Manifestation of God, for the Divine Mandate the Centre of His Covenant devised for the spiritual conquest of this planet, for the Mighty Crusade fashioned by the Guardian to implement the terms of that Mandate, and for the innumerable, glorious and immortal victories won during the last decade. On that momentous occasion, to which all are invited and which it is hoped as many as possible will attend, particularly representatives of the diversified ethnic groups now included in the pale of the Faith, the friends will have the solemn privilege of visiting the resting-place of their dearly-loved Guardian, there to place in the homage of their hearts the offering of ten years of unsurpassed service in the annals of religious history, there to rededicate themselves to the work that lies ahead as the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enters a new phase in its unfoldment.

Already the extraordinary progress the Faith has made during the past twelve months in fulfilling the goals of the Plan conceived by Shoghi Effendi and entrusted to our care cannot but fill our hearts with astonishment at the magnitude of the victories won in so many fields in so short a time. These triumphs bear eloquent tribute to the spiritual power released by him who, speaking with the Voice of Divine Authority, conferred upon the faithful followers of Bahá’u’lláh a capacity for accomplishment far beyond the understanding of those unaware of the Almighty Power of the Manifestation which flowed through him, and which has safely brought us to this glorious hour.

The standard of Bahá’u’lláh has now been raised in no less than two hundred and fifty-seven countries, islands and dependencies, including all of the virgin territories specified by Shoghi Effendi at the beginning of the Crusade with the exception of the ten lying within the Soviet orbit which up to the present time have proven inaccessible.

On the eve of the inauguration of the final year of this Crusade, the number of localities throughout the world where Bahá’ís reside is

well over seven thousand five hundred, an increase of five thousand centres since the inception of the Plan in 1953. More than one thousand of these have been added during the past year, bringing the total in Australasia to one hundred and sixty-two, in the British Isles to one hundred and sixty-three, in Germany and Austria to one hundred and seventy, in the Goal Countries of Europe to nearly one hundred and eighty, in the Dominion of Canada to one hundred and eighty-four, in Latin America to five hundred and thirty-nine, in the Indian sub-continent to six hundred and seventy-one, in the entire Pacific area to nearly seven hundred, in Persia to more than one thousand one hundred, in the United States of America to nearly sixteen hundred, and in Africa to more than eighteen hundred and fifty. In the period since last Ridván, Africa has overtaken both the “Cradle of the Faith” and the “Cradle of the Administrative Order”, and now stands out as the area where “the warming and healing light of an all-conquering Revelation” radiates from more centres than any other continent of the globe.

The ninth year of the world-encircling Plan of the beloved Guardian has witnessed further striking progress in such widely dispersed regions as India, Latin America, the Pacific area, and Africa. The significant victories, achieved by the intrepid followers of Bahá’u’lláh in these lands, undoubtedly reflect the operation of those spiritual forces which both the Master and Shoghi Effendi promised would in the not distant future bring about a wave of new enrolments such as has not occurred since the early days of the Faith.

India, one of the first countries in the world to receive the light of a newly-born Revelation has, during the past year, witnessed a tide of mass conversion not only wholly unprecedented in that country but without parallel anywhere in the entire world during the last one hundred years of Bahá’í history. Since Ridván, 1961 well over thirteen thousand new believers have come into the Faith as a result of the mass teaching campaign carried out in the villages of India by the members of what was previously a relatively small national community.

In Latin America, the area where such an outstanding victory was achieved last year by the formation of no less than twenty-one new pillars of the Universal House of Justice, the work of the Faith is progressing in all fields, under the aegis of these new national bodies, and rapid progress is being made in consolidating the communities within its borders and in carrying the Faith to the Indians, “the original inhabitants of America” mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, who are entering the Cause in great numbers. No less than sixty-two different Indian tribes are now represented in the Bahá’í communities of North, Central and South America, nearly four times the number mentioned by Shoghi Effendi five years ago in his Ridván Message of 1957.

The Bolivian community, which a year ago had already fired the imagination of the Bahá’í world by the extraordinary progress made in attracting new adherents from the ranks of the Indian population, now has nearly four thousand believers, a gain of more than twenty-five hundred since last Ridván. Latest reports indicate that as many as sixty Local Assemblies may be formed this year. Already these original inhabitants of Bolivia are arising to carry the flame of the Faith to neighbouring republics; recently, as a result of the devoted efforts of these pioneers, the rising tide of new enrolments amongst the descendants of an ancient American civilization has been extended to Peru and also to Chile where, during the last two months, nearly two hundred Indians have entered the Faith, representing the first conversions on such a scale in that country.

In Panama, where nearly three hundred Indian believers have been enrolled in recent months, the number of Assemblies will be doubled this year. In Mexico and Costa Rica, the past year has witnessed in the former a doubling of the number of believers comprising the national community, while the latter, as a result of a new wave of teaching activity on the part of its native believers, anticipates tripling this Ridván the number of Local Assemblies existing a year ago.

Throughout the Pacific region the Cause continues to gain adherents at an ever accelerating pace. In South East Asia the number of believers has more than doubled in the past two years and now stands

at the impressive total of fifteen thousand five hundred, nearly seven thousand of whom have been enrolled during the last six months. In the entire Pacific area the diverse races and peoples comprising the Bahá'í communities in that part of the globe have established the Faith in over one hundred new localities during the past twelve months, including, for the first time, the northern island of the Mentawai group, one of the most important links in that chain of islands which was the first territory in the Pacific to witness a mass movement into the Faith, a development which brought such great joy to the beloved Guardian in the closing years of his life.

The steady consolidation and rapid expansion taking place in Africa has brought the number of followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that continent to nearly thirty thousand, a gain of almost ten thousand believers since Ridván a year ago. The most spectacular increases have occurred in the region of Central and East Africa, but substantial gains have also been recorded in the areas under the jurisdiction of the three other Regional National Assemblies; more than six hundred Local Spiritual Assemblies are now established throughout the length and breadth of that continent and its neighbouring islands, a total far exceeding that of any other major area in the Bahá'í world; three hundred and twenty-seven African tribes are now represented in the Bahá'í Community, more than forty having been added during the past year. Africa has indeed fulfilled the high hopes and confident expectations of the Guardian when, in his Message to the first Intercontinental Conference in Kampala, he alluded to the expansion even then beginning to take place there as “a multiplication designed ultimately to bring to a proper equipoise the divers ethnic elements comprised within the highly diversified world-embracing Bahá'í fellowship.”

The steady gain which has taken place in recent years in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, comprising what Shoghi Effendi termed “the broad and indestructible foundation of a rising Order”, has brought the total of these divinely-ordained institutions to well over two thousand, double the number which he so proudly announced in his last Message to the Bahá'í world. The total of incorporated Assemblies, both Local and National, now exceeds three hundred. Twenty-one of the fifty-six National and Regional

Assemblies which will be established and functioning at the end of the Crusade have secured their incorporation; attainment of the remaining thirty-five registrations constitutes one of the major unfinished tasks of the Ten Year Plan, and must, during the final year of the Crusade engage the earnest efforts of those national bodies, both old and new, which have not yet achieved this important objective.

As the Cause steadily expands, recognition of its independent character by governmental authorities becomes increasingly important. This objective has been furthered during the past year by official acceptance of the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate throughout the Commonwealth of New Zealand, in the Province of Ontario in the Dominion of Canada, and in the States of Colorado and South Carolina in the United States of America. Nearly fifty sovereign states and governmental subdivisions have accorded legal recognition to the Bahá'í marriage ceremony. Bahá'í Holy Days are now officially recognized by school authorities in one hundred and five different countries, states and cities, including in the United States, seventy-seven school districts in twenty-seven States, as well as the District of Columbia.

The literature of the Faith has now been translated into no less than two hundred and ninety-six different languages, over two hundred of which have been completed since the beginning of the Ten Year Plan. Virtually all of the ninety-one originally specified by Shoghi Effendi as Crusade goals, or those subsequently approved by him as substitutions, have been completed, with the exception of a few used in territories or countries within the Soviet orbit.

The completion and dedication of the Mother Temple of the Antipodes in Sydney, Australia, the second Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to be completed since the inception of the Crusade, constitutes still another milestone in the development of the institutions of the Faith during the past year. The nation-wide publicity attending this event, and the public interest which it aroused, foreshadow the fulfilment of the destiny of this sacred Structure as one of those great "Silent Teachers" of the Cause. In addition to the Temples already completed

or under construction in four continents, sites for future Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs have been acquired in nearly forty-five other localities, many of these representing goals of supplementary plans given by the Guardian himself to National or Regional Assemblies established since the beginning of the Crusade. Recent acquisitions include such properties in Rangoon, Burma; Istanbul, Turkey; Montevideo, Uruguay; as well as the site for the Mother Temple of Venezuela, now in the final stages of legal transfer to Bahá'í ownership.

Uninterrupted construction of the third great House of Worship called for by Shoghi Effendi, the Mother Temple of Europe, now rising in the heart of that continent, will require a continuous and sacrificial flow of funds, not only from the European believers, but from the friends in all parts of the globe who, mindful of the stirring promises of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will wish to share in this noble undertaking and hasten the day when still another continent will receive the blessings which flow from an Edifice dedicated solely to the mention of God and His praise.

During the remaining months of the World Crusade, when the financial requirements for attaining total victory are so tremendous, the friends everywhere must become aware, as never before, of the paramount need for a steady and continuous flow of contributions in support of their National Funds, an outpouring which the beloved Guardian characterized as "the life-blood" of the National and Regional Assemblies now called upon to complete their allotted goals in the few remaining months of his Plan. The spiritual significance and blessing of voluntary giving should be emphasized anew by each National Assembly as it presents to the members of its community the obligations which must still be discharged. The friends must be assisted to grasp the significance of these words of the beloved Guardian, calling upon each and every believer to place his or her share on the altar of Bahá'í sacrifice: "The institution of the National Fund, so vital and essential for the uninterrupted progress of these activities must, in particular, be assured of the whole-hearted, the ever-increasing and universal support of the mass of believers . . . All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate. Upon the degree of self-sacrifice involved in these individual contributions will directly depend the efficacy and the spiritual influence which these

nascent administrative institutions, called into being through the power of Bahá'u'lláh, and by virtue of the Design conceived by the Centre of His Covenant, will exert.”

The body of the Bahá'ís throughout the world, the instruments through whom this latest phase in the Master Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá alone can be accomplished, have opportunities now, in the remaining months of the World Crusade, which can never be theirs again, which no group of people will ever have in future decades and centuries. That they will permit a single objective of the Plan to fail owing to lack of the necessary material means to ensure its accomplishment is inconceivable.

A special appeal must be made, at this crucial point in the spread of our Faith, to all pioneers to remain steadfastly at their posts. The prizes won at such a cost of sacrifice and devotion on the part of not only those souls who abandoned their own countries or their own homes in order to assist in establishing the Cause in other lands or other centres, but on the part of many dedicated souls who poured their substance into the Joint Deputization Fund and various national funds, must be safeguarded and strengthened at all costs.

In particular those pioneers and believers, struggling in less promising parts of the globe, and lavishing on seemingly barren soil their labour of love for Bahá'u'lláh, should not lose heart; far from feeling discouraged over the lack of results in their territory they should receive fresh stimulation from the remarkable evidences of the progress of the work in other regions. Let them remember that the harvest now beginning to be reaped in India took many years to yield its first fruits, that the present rapid advances being made in Latin America represent the effort of decades, that the victories won in both Africa and the Pacific area are, as our Guardian himself pointed out, due in no small measure to the remarkable spiritual receptivity of the people in those parts of the world. Let them recall the innumerable promises enshrined in our Teachings which assure us that all nations and peoples will be quickened by this Faith and enter beneath its shadow, and, deriving fresh courage from these prophetic words, have confidence in the ultimate triumph of their labours and persevere in

their dedicated service to the Cause of God. The friends, whether in lands now witnessing the first waves of mass conversion or striving in more difficult territories, must determine to compensate through their steadfast and unflagging toil for the disabilities still being suffered by the long-oppressed and valiant body of the faithful in Bahá'u'lláh's native land, as well as by their brethren in other countries where the traditional enemies of the Faith are seeking to put out its light and subvert its standard.

Indeed, not only must the host of Bahá'u'lláh's army stay at its post and guard its conquests, redressing the balance a thousandfold for those believers who live in lands where the institutions of the Faith have been officially banned, its properties confiscated, its Assemblies dissolved and its members threatened, but it must, on the eve of the last year of Shoghi Effendi's Crusade, recall his emphatic words that "the newly-opened territories of the globe must, under no circumstances, be allowed to relapse into the state of spiritual deprivation from which they have so recently and laboriously been rescued." While there is yet time it behoves those National Assemblies to which these precious virgin territories were originally entrusted, and some of which are at present without a single believer, to make one last supreme effort to heed the words of their Guardian and to comply with his explicit wish.

In reviewing the wonderful achievements of nine years' unremitting labour and the heavy responsibilities now resting upon the believers in every part of the world, the realization is forced upon every thinking Bahá'í that the Cause has entered an entirely new stage in its evolution. The response to the appeal of the Guardian in his last Message to the entire body of the faithful throughout the world for ". . . an unprecedented increase in the number of avowed supporters of the Faith, in all the continents of the globe, of every race, clime, creed and colour, and from every stratum of present-day society, coupled with a corresponding increase in the number of Bahá'í centres . . ." has been truly stupendous. Already his ardent wish has been partially fulfilled. Forces over which we have no control are now sweeping us into an era of expansion breathtaking in its possibilities. The sudden enlistment, in a single country, of over thirteen thousand new believers in one year, the news which is pouring in to the World

Centre of the Faith of the opening up of new areas where the possibility of mass enrolment is equally great and may, at any time, take place on an equally large scale, is awe-inspiring, nay almost frightening in the vista it exposes to our dazzled eyes. The handful of teachers and administrators, labouring in Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Pacific suddenly find themselves called upon, for the first time in the history of this Cause, to receive and welcome not a few hundred souls eager to enlist in the Army of Bahá'u'lláh but many thousands, and perhaps, in the near future, many hundreds of thousands. Such a sudden turn in the fortunes of a Faith which the Bahá'ís, with considerable complacency, have conceived of as being still in the slowly-growing, gradually maturing, laboriously evolving stage of its development, calls for a complete re-orientation of thought, a profound evaluation of motives, a careful study of those texts which can throw light on the needs of the present hour.

It was “troops” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so ardently desired should enter beneath the shadow of His Father’s Cause. Troops are now entering. The entire purpose of His glorious Tablets of the Divine Plan was to initiate teaching on a world scale. “I fervently hope that in the near future”, He wrote in those Tablets, “the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements.”

Suddenly, like a thief in the night, we find that our sacrifices, our labours, great and small, during a period of one hundred and nineteen years, our pioneer efforts, especially those conducted during recent years, our laborious erection of various national and regional bodies in all parts of the globe, our silent prayers, our tears and patience and loyalty, have borne their miraculous fruit, and the first ripples of an awakening consciousness of the meaning and glory of Bahá'u'lláh's Message are passing over the sleeping giant of humanity.

This is not a religion destined for any one race or any one people. It is the property of the entire human race. Bahá'u'lláh has come to that soul who believes in Him. What concern is it of ours if, at this particular moment in history, it is those people of the world as yet uncorrupted by a materialistic civilization who are ready to accept Him? Is not this perhaps their unique and golden opportunity to

receive the education of His teachings ere it is too late and the corrosive aspects of that civilization have educated them in ways that lead away from God rather than towards Him? May not, in the mysterious workings of God's Plan, so far above the capacity of our finite minds to grasp, this process of conversion on a large scale of the peoples of the Pacific Islands, the heart of India, the African continent and the descendants of the Aboriginal population of the Americas now taking place, release forces which will have wide repercussions in those venerable strongholds of both Eastern and Western culture whose people, overcome by spiritual lassitude, disillusioned and cynical, find themselves indifferent for the most part to the redemptive Message of Bahá'u'lláh?

Let us ponder these words of the Guardian and seek out, in the light of present events, their implication: "As the Plan bequeathed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá unfolds, through successive decades of the present century, its measureless potentialities, and gathers within the field of its operations nation after nation in successive continents of the globe, it will be increasingly recognized not only as the most potent agency for the development of the World Administrative System, but also as a primary factor in the birth and efflorescence of the World Order itself in both the East and the West."

Nation after nation has been swept into the orbit of the Faith since 1921. The believers, acting for thirty-six years under the direct guidance of the Interpreter of the Teachings of the Bahá'í Revelation, have been laying the foundation and erecting the framework of the administrative institutions of this Faith. How can we fail to perceive that the tabernacle having been raised, the people are now seeking its shelter?

Fifty-six great administrative institutions now exist in the Bahá'í world. Were such wonderful institutions as these fashioned to administer the affairs, for the most part, of a handful of believers? Or are they to be regarded as mighty doors flung wide to the world and designed to enable its spiritually hungry multitudes to enter into the stronghold of Almighty God? "The fundamental purpose of the Bahá'í Administration at the present time is to teach the Faith.

Administering it is only to coordinate its activities and to safeguard it”, wrote Shoghi Effendi, four months before he passed away, to one of the new European Regional Assemblies. He informed the Bahá’í world, that same year, that “the pre-eminent task of teaching the Faith to the multitudes” was “the bed-rock on which the solidity and the stability of the multiplying institutions of a rising Order must rest.” In other words, these institutions, as they grow and consolidate, must be outgoing and not ingrowing in their action. “Nothing could be more tragic”, he wrote, “than if the establishment of these great administrative bodies should stifle . . . the teaching work.” “The purpose of the new National Assemblies . . . and the purpose of any administrative body, is to carry the Message to the people and enlist the sincere under the banner of the Faith.” In a letter written as late as July, 1957, to one of the Regional Assemblies, he said: “. . . the friends should be very careful not to place hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the Faith . . . The essential thing is that the candidate for enrolment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá’u’lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all the Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely . . .” In another of his letters he said: “The early believers in both the East and the West, we must always remember, knew practically nothing compared to what the average Bahá’í knows about his Faith nowadays, yet they were the ones who shed their blood, the ones who arose and said: ‘I believe’, requiring no proof, and often never having read a single word of the Teachings. Therefore, those responsible for accepting new enrolments must just be sure of one thing—that the heart of the applicant has been touched with the spirit of the Faith. Everything else can be built on this foundation gradually.”

In the world today “a two-fold process”, the Guardian wrote, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent

Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.”

Concomitant with the forces of integration working inside the Faith and those of disintegration working outside it is another process which he many times called to our attention: the chain reaction of victories and crises. Who can doubt for a moment that as the institutions of our Faith in land after land, gathering strength and being epitomized through the election of independent national bodies, responsible, in conjunction with the present Regional Assemblies, for the election one year from now of the Supreme House of Justice, are raised, forces will be released of such spiritual power as to galvanize the body of the Faith throughout the world with a new life and enable the Cause to sweep forward on its course and enter a new era in the process of its propagation to the masses of East and West, as well as its recognition and official acceptance as an independent World Religion. Who also can doubt for a moment that this very process of consolidation taking place during this last year of the Crusade, when the goals of the beloved Guardian, susceptible of accomplishment within the present framework of world affairs, are for the most part either won or within our reach, must inevitably unleash fresh trials and tests, challenging the devotion and tenacity of the friends and driving the roots of both the new believers and the national communities deeper into the soil of faith, as well as sifting out the weak and raising up the strong in that constant purification of the ranks of the faithful which takes place in the course of the growth of this World Community.

Whatever the immediate future may hold in store, either for us or for our fellow-men, the path of action we must tread lies clearly before us. “Ours”, Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “is the duty to fix our gaze with undeviating attention on the duties and responsibilities confronting us at this present hour, to concentrate our resources, both material and spiritual, on the tasks that lie immediately ahead, to ensure that no time is wasted, that no opportunity is missed, that no

obligation is evaded, that no task is half-heartedly performed, that no decision is procrastinated.”

“The Kingdom of God”, the beloved Master assured us, “is possessed of limitless potency. Audacious must be the army of life if the confirming aid of that Kingdom is to be repeatedly vouchsafed unto it . . . Now is the time to reveal the force of one’s strength, the stoutness of one’s heart and the might of one’s soul.”

On the occasion of another Centenary, over eighteen years ago, the Guardian, in never-to-be-forgotten words, called upon us to arise and fulfil the work entrusted to our keeping. These words are as applicable, as deeply moving and passionate in their appeal, as if he had meant them for this present fate-laden hour. Let us open our hearts to their message of love and of the longing they convey: “. . . to all, without distinction of race, nation, class, colour, age or sex, I feel moved, as the fateful hour of a memorable centenary approaches, to address my plea, with all the fervour that my soul can command and all the love that my heart contains, to rededicate themselves, collectively and individually, to the task that lies ahead of them . . . I direct my impassioned appeal to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts, and prepare for that Day of Days when His victorious battalions will, to the accompaniment of hosannas from the invisible angels in the Abhá Kingdom, celebrate the hour of final victory.”

HANDS OF THE CAUSE IN THE HOLY LAND

April 1963

TO ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTIONS,

BAHÁ'Í WILMETTE

May 19, 1963

HANDS CAUSE WISH EXPRESS LOVING APPRECIATION HEROIC
DEDICATED EFFORTS FRIENDS EVERYWHERE ASSURING TRIUMPHANT
CONCLUSION BELOVED GUARDIAN'S MIGHTY CRUSADE STOP ENTIRE
BODY HANDS DESIROUS DEVOTE ALL THEIR EFFORTS PROTECTION
PROPAGATION FAITH ACCORDING FUNCTIONS LAID DOWN HOLY TEXTS
AND SUSTAINED UPLIFTED ESTABLISHMENT SUPREME EDIFICE
UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE INTEND CONCENTRATE ACTIVITIES ALL
IMPORTANT TEACHING WORK THIS GLORIOUS PERIOD EXPANSION FAITH
STOP OUR BELOVED GUARDIAN ASSOCIATED FIVE HANDS WITH WORK
HOLY LAND HIS LIFETIME STOP FOLLOWING THIS PATTERN FIVE HANDS
NOW ASSIGNED HOLY LAND THUS ENSURING AT ALL TIMES PRESENCE
HANDS WORLD CENTRE FACILITATE INTERNATIONAL WORK
INSTITUTION HANDS ASSIST HOUSE JUSTICE ANY WAY DEEMED
ADVISABLE THAT EXALTED BODY STOP FIVE CHOSEN SERVE HOLY LAND
ARE AMATU'L-BAHA RUHIYYIH KHÁNUM LEROY IOAS ALI AKBAR
FURÚTAN PAUL HANEY ABU'L QASIM FAIZÍ STOP CHANGES ASSIGNMENT
HANDS CONTINENTS WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY STOP CONFIDENT
SPIRIT RELEASED MOST GREAT JUBILEE WILL INSPIRE FRIENDS ARISE
ENSURE CONTINUATION UNPRECEDENTED TIDE VICTORIES TEACHING
FIELD.

[CABLE] HANDSFAITH

PART III
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

April 1963:

First Message from the Universal House of Justice

Presented at the World Congress

“All praise, O my God, be to Thee Who art the Source of all glory and majesty, of greatness and honor, of sovereignty and dominion, of loftiness and grace, of awe and power. Whomsoever Thou willest Thou causest to draw nigh unto the Most Great Ocean, and on whomsoever Thou desirest Thou conferrest the honor of recognizing Thy Most Ancient Name. Of all who are in heaven and on earth, none can withstand the operation of Thy sovereign Will. From all eternity Thou didst rule the entire creation, and Thou wilt continue for evermore to exercise Thy dominion over all created things. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.”

Beloved friends:

On this glorious occasion, the celebration of the Most Great Jubilee, we raise our grateful thanks to Bahá'u'lláh for all His bounties showered upon the friends throughout the world. This historic moment marks at one and the same time the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of the Promised One of all ages, the termination of the first epoch of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá designed to establish the Faith of God in all the world, and the successful conclusion of our beloved Guardian's world-encircling Crusade, enabling his lovers and loved ones everywhere to lay this glorious harvest of victory in his name at the feet of the Blessed Beauty. This Most Great Jubilee is the crowning victory of the life work of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the

Cause of God. He it was, and he alone, who unfolded the potentialities of the widely scattered, numerically small, and largely unorganized Bahá'í community which had been called into being during the Heroic Age of the Faith. He it was who unfolded the grand design of God's Holy Cause; set in motion the great plans of teaching already outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá; established the institutions and greatly extended the endowments at the World Centre, and raised the Temples of America, Africa, Australasia, and Europe; developed the Administrative Order of the Cause throughout the world; and set the ark of the Cause true on its course. He appointed the Hands of the Cause of God.

The paeans of joy and gratitude, of love and adoration which we now raise to the throne of Bahá'u'lláh would be inadequate, and the celebrations of this Most Great Jubilee in which, as promised by our beloved Guardian, we are now engaged would be marred, were no tribute paid at this time to the Hands of the Cause of God. For they share the victory with their beloved commander, he who raised them up and appointed them. They kept the ship on its course and brought it safe to port. The Universal House of Justice, with pride and love, recalls on this supreme occasion its profound admiration for the heroic work which they have accomplished. We do not wish to dwell on the appalling dangers which faced the infant Cause when it was suddenly deprived of our beloved Shoghi Effendi, but rather to acknowledge with all the love and gratitude of our hearts the reality of the sacrifice, the labor, the self-discipline, the superb stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God. We can think of no more fitting words to express our tribute to these dearly loved and valiant souls than to recall the words of Bahá'u'lláh Himself: "Light and glory, greeting and praise be upon the Hands of His Cause, through whom the light of long-suffering hath shone forth, and the declaration of authority is proven of God, the powerful, the mighty, the independent; and through whom the sea of bestowal hath moved, and the breeze of the favor of God, the Lord of mankind, hath wafted."

The members of the Universal House of Justice, all being in Haifa at the time of the election, were able to visit the Holy Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where they prostrated themselves at the Sacred Thresholds and humbly sought strength and

assistance in the mighty task before them. Later, in London, they have paid homage at the resting-place of Shoghi Effendi, the blessed and sacred bough of the Tree of Holiness.

As soon as the House of Justice is able to organize its work and deploy its forces, it will examine carefully all the conditions of the Cause of God, and communications will be made to the friends. At this time we call upon the believers everywhere to follow up vigorously the opportunities opened up by the World Crusade. Consolidation and deepening must go hand in hand with an eager extension of the teaching work so that the onward march of the Cause may continue unabated in preparation for future plans. Now that the attention of the public is becoming more and more drawn to the Cause of God, the friends must brace themselves and prepare their institutions to sustain the gaze of the world, whether it be friendly or hostile, eager or idle.

The Universal House of Justice greets you all lovingly and joyfully at this time, and asks you to pray fervently for its speedy development and the spiritual strengthening of its members.

Message to National Conventions

The marvelous happenings which have transpired during and immediately after the twelve days of Ridván attest the greatness of the Cause of God, and fill every Bahá'í heart to overflowing with joy and gratitude. It was in obedience to the summons of the Lord of Hosts Himself that the elected representatives of the fifty-six national and regional communities of the Bahá'í world were called to elect, in the shadow of God's Holy Mountain and in the house of the Centre of His Covenant, the members of the Universal House of Justice. It was the Sign of God on earth, the Dayspring of Divine Guidance, the

Guardian of the Cause of God, who gathered more than six thousand Bahá'ís from all parts of the earth to the celebration of the Most Great Jubilee in London.

The first of these historic occasions was marked by events of extreme spiritual and administrative significance at the World Centre of the Faith. The daily visits of large groups of believers, of many varying backgrounds, to the sacred shrines in the twin holy cities; the holding of the first International Bahá'í Convention and the successful accomplishment of its main task; the celebration of the Ridván Feast by some three hundred believers in the company of the Hands of the Cause of God in the precincts of the Haram-i-Aqdas, are events of unique character and untold significance in the history of our beloved Faith.

The celebration of the Most Great Jubilee in London must be described elsewhere. Suffice it to say now that this greatest gathering of Bahá'ís ever held in one place was permeated by a spirit of such bliss as could only have come from the outpourings of the Abhá Kingdom. The review of the progress of the Cause; the presentation of believers from the new races and countries of the world brought within the pale of the Faith during the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Crusade, of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, those valiant souls who carried the banner of Bahá'u'lláh to the unopened and often inhospitable regions of the earth; the spontaneous outbursts of singing of "Alláh-u-Abhá," the informal gatherings, the constant greetings of Bahá'u'lláh's warriors known to each other only by name and service; the youth gatherings; the unprecedented publicity in the press, on radio and television; the daily stream of visitors to the beloved Guardian's resting-place; the radiant faces and heightened awareness of the true and real brotherhood of the human race within the Kingdom of the Everlasting Father, are among the outstanding events of this supreme occasion, the crowning victory of the life work of Shoghi Effendi.

The Universal House of Justice wishes to reaffirm at this time the tribute which it felt moved to pay to the Hands of the Cause of God at the World Congress, those precious souls who have brought the Cause safely to victory in the name of Shoghi Effendi. We wish also to remember the devoted work of their Auxiliary Board members, as well as the services of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, of the army of pioneers, the members of the national and regional spiritual assemblies, the services and prayers and sacrifices of the believers everywhere, all of which in the sum total have attracted such bounties and favors from Bahá'u'lláh.

The Universal House of Justice, in several sessions held in the Holy Land and in London, has been able to initiate its work and to make arrangements for the establishment of the institution in Haifa. It has no officers and henceforth its communications to the Bahá'í world will be signed UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE over an embossed seal.

The Cause of God, launched on the sea of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has achieved, under the superb leadership of its beloved Guardian, a spread throughout the world and a momentum which must now carry it forward on the next stage of its world-redeeming mission, the second epoch of the Divine Plan. The Universal House of Justice, in close consultation with the Hands of the Cause, is examining the vast range of Bahá'í activity and growth in order to prepare a detailed plan of expansion for the whole Bahá'í community, to be launched at Ridván 1964. But there are some objectives to be achieved at once.

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

The consolidation of the goals and new communities of the Bahá'í world is an urgent and immediate task facing the fifty-six national spiritual assemblies, and an essential preparation for the launching of the new plans. Pioneers must be maintained at their posts and all the local spiritual assemblies strengthened through a firm establishment of Bahá'í community life and an active teaching program. Those national spiritual assemblies which rest on the basis of a small

number of local spiritual assemblies must make great efforts to insure that this number will be increased at Ridván 1964. Pioneers ready to go to consolidation areas, as well as those eager to open new territories, should make their offers through their national spiritual assembly.

The great work of teaching must be extended, not only in those areas where mass conversion is beginning, but everywhere. The high intensity of teaching activity reached at the end of the World Crusade, far from slackening, must now be increased as the friends everywhere draw on the vast spiritual powers released as a result of the celebration of the Most Great Jubilee and the emergence of the Universal House of Justice.

The Ten Year Crusade witnessed the completion of the structure of the Mother Temple of Europe. It is now imperative to complete, without delay, the interior decoration, to install utilities and lay access roads, to landscape grounds, and to construct the caretaker's house. This work will cost not less than \$210,000, but if delayed it will cost considerably more. The House of Justice calls upon the national spiritual assemblies to allocate substantial budgets for the immediate completion of this work.

PROJECTS TO BE EMBARKED UPON

The plan to be embarked upon next Ridván, the details of which will be announced during the coming year, will include such projects as the extension and embellishment of the endowments at the World Centre; collation of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi; continual reinforcement of the ties binding the Bahá'í world to the United Nations; formation of many more national spiritual assemblies, both by division of existing regional spiritual assemblies and the development of new Bahá'í communities, together with the purchase of national Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites, and national endowments; the opening of new territories to the Faith; detailed plans for national spiritual assemblies involving, in some areas, consolidation goals, in others the multiplication of Bahá'í institutes and schools, in others a great enrichment of Bahá'í

literature, and in all a vast increase in the number of Bahá'ís, and the holding of oceanic and intercontinental conferences.

All such expansion and development of the Faith will be dependent upon the Bahá'í Fund. The Universal House of Justice calls the attention of every believer to this vital and pressing matter, and asks the national spiritual assemblies to pay special attention to the principle of universal participation, so that every single follower of Bahá'u'lláh may make his offering, however small or great, and thereby identify himself with the work of the Cause everywhere. It is our hope that a constant flow of contributions to the International Fund will make it possible to build up sufficient reserves for the launching of the new plan in 1964.

Beloved friends, we enter the second epoch of the Divine Plan blessed beyond compare, riding the crest of a great wave of victory produced for us by our beloved Guardian. The Cause of God is now firmly rooted in the world. Forward then, confident in the power and protection of the Lord of Hosts, Who will, through storm and trial, toil and jubilee, use His devoted followers to bring to a despairing humanity the life-giving waters of His supreme Revelation.

May 7, 1963—(London)

April 1964

The Universal House of Justice

April 1964

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The divinely propelled process, described in such awe-inspiring words by our beloved Guardian, which began six thousand years ago at the dawn of the Adamic cycle and which is destined to culminate in “the stage at which the light of God’s triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet”, is now entering its tenth and last part.

The Ten Year Crusade, so recently consummated in a blaze of victory and rejoicing, constituted the entire ninth part of this process. It saw the Cause of God leap forward in one mighty decade-long effort to the point at which the foundations of its Administrative Order were laid throughout the world, thus preparing the way for that awakening of the masses which must characterize the future progress of the Faith.

From the beginning of this Dispensation the most urgent summons of the Word of God, voiced successively by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, has been to teach the Cause. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His own words, “spent His days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service”. Shoghi Effendi, discharging the sacred mission laid upon him, raised the Administrative Order of the Faith, already enshrined

within the Sacred Writings, and forged it into a teaching instrument to accomplish through a succession of plans, national, international, and global, the entire Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and he clearly foresaw in the “tremendously long” tenth part of the process already referred to, a series of plans to be launched by the Universal House of Justice, extending over “successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith”.

The first of these plans is now before us. Opening at Ridván 1964, while the memories of the glorious Jubilee of 1963 still surge within our hearts, it must, during its nine-year course, witness a huge expansion of the Cause of God and universal participation by all believers in the life of that Cause.

At the World Centre of the Faith the tasks of the Plan include publication of a synopsis and codification of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, the Most Holy Book; formulation of the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice; development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, in consultation with the body of the Hands of the Cause, with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation; continued collation and classification of the Bahá’í Sacred Scriptures as well as of the writings of Shoghi Effendi; continued efforts directed towards the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy and its recognition as an independent religion; the preparation of a plan for the befitting development and beautification of the entire area of Bahá’í property surrounding the Holy Shrines; extension of the existing gardens on Mount Carmel; development of the relationship between the Bahá’í Community and the United Nations; the holding of Oceanic and Inter-Continental Conferences; the co-ordination of worldwide plans to commemorate, in 1967/68, the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Proclamation to the kings and rulers which centred round His revelation of the Súriy-i-Mulúk in Adrianople.

In the world community the Plan involves the opening of seventy virgin territories and the resettlement of twenty-four; the raising of the number of National Spiritual Assemblies, the pillars sustaining the Universal House of Justice, to one hundred and eight, nine times

the number which embarked on the first historic World Crusade in 1953; increasing the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies to over thirteen thousand seven hundred, scattered throughout the territories and islands of the world, at least one thousand seven hundred of them to be incorporated; the raising of the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside to over fifty-four thousand; the building of two more Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, one in Asia and one in Latin America; the acquisition of thirty-two Teaching Institutes, fifty-two national Hazíratu'l-Quds, fifty-four national Endowments, and sites for sixty-two future Temples; wide extension of recognition by civil authorities of the Bahá'í Holy Days and Bahá'í Marriage Certificates; the translation of literature into one hundred and thirty-three more languages, and its enrichment in major languages into which translations have already been made; the establishment of four new Bahá'í Publishing Trusts, and a vast increase in the financial resources of the Faith.

The healthy development of the Cause requires that this great expansion be accompanied by the dedicated effort of every believer in teaching, in living the Bahá'í life, in contributing to the Fund, and particularly in the persistent effort to understand more and more the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In the words of our beloved Guardian, "One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh".

Expansion and universal participation are the twin objectives of this initial phase of the second epoch of the Divine Plan, and all the goals assigned to the sixty-nine National Communities are contributory to them. The process of co-operation between National Spiritual Assemblies, already initiated by the beloved Guardian, will, during the course of this Plan, apply to over two hundred specific projects and will further strengthen this process which may well assume great importance in future stages of the Formative Age.

Once more, dear friends, we enter the battle but with an incomparably greater array than that which embarked upon the World Crusade in 1953. To that small force of twelve national communities, now veteran campaigners, have been added fifty-seven new legions, each under the generalship of a National Spiritual Assembly, each destined to become a veteran of this and future campaigns. That Crusade began with slightly more than six hundred Local Spiritual Assemblies, the greater part of which were situated in Persia, North America and Europe; the home fronts now comprise nearly four thousand six hundred Local Spiritual Assemblies scattered throughout the continents and islands of the world. We begin this Plan with a tremendous momentum, exemplified by the addition, since last Ridván, of over four thousand new centres and thirteen National Spiritual Assemblies, and by the beginning, in several countries, of that entry by troops into the Cause of God prophesied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and so eagerly anticipated by Him.

The Standard-Bearers of this Nine Year Plan are those same divinely appointed, tried and victorious souls who bore the standard of the World Crusade, the Hands of the Cause of God, whose advice and consultation have been invaluable in the working out of this Nine Year Plan. Supported by their “DEPUTIES, ASSISTANTS [and] ADVISERS”, the members of the Auxiliary Boards, they will inspire and protect the army of God, lead through every breach to the limit of available resources and sustain those communities struggling over intractable or stony ground, so that by 1973 the celebrations befitting the centenary of the Revelation of the Most Holy Book may be undertaken by a victorious, firmly established, organically united world community, dedicated to the service of God and the final triumph of His Cause.

Therefore let each of the sixty-nine communities seize its tasks, at once consider how best to accomplish them within the allotted span, raise its band of pioneers, consecrate itself to unremitting labour and set out on its mission. Now is the golden opportunity. For whatever convulsions the waywardness of a godless and materialistic age may yet precipitate in the world, however grievous may be the effects of the rolling up of the present order on the plans and efforts of the Community of the Most Great Name, we must seize the opportunities

of the hour and go forward confident that all things are within His mighty grasp and that, if we but play our part, total and unconditional victory will inevitably be ours.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1965

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1965

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The tide of victory which carried the Bahá'í World community to the celebrations of the Most Great Jubilee is still rising. A ceaseless shower of divine confirmation rains upon our efforts, its evidences apparent in the many noteworthy achievements of the few brief months since the launching of the Nine Year Plan. The most spectacular of these is the increase in the number of centres where Bahá'ís reside from fifteen thousand one hundred and sixty-eight at Riḍván 1964 to twenty-one thousand and six at the present time, an increase of nearly six thousand in one year. No less remarkable is the progress of the teaching work in India where the number of believers now exceeds a hundred and forty thousand, an increase of more than thirty thousand since Riḍván 1964. Pioneers are moving to those few remaining territories of the earth as yet unilluminated by the light of God's new Revelation; "the vast increase" in the size of the Cause, called for at the launching of the Plan, appears to be developing, while in country after country the institutions and endowments of the Faith are being steadily and firmly established.

During the past twelve months the goals assigned to the World Centre have been actively pursued. Basic decisions and actions to implement the goal of "Development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, with a view to extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation", have already been

conveyed to the friends. Following their meeting in the Holy Land last October, the members of this august body, the Standard-Bearers of this Nine Year Plan as well as of the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Crusade, already laden with honours and services, have arisen with renewed and matchless vigour to rouse the spirits of the friends to meet the supreme teaching challenge, to lend their counsel and assistance to the administrative bodies, and to diffuse the divine fragrances and love of God through all the world. The increase in the numbers of Board members and the new executive arrangements will, it is confidently anticipated, enable the beloved Hands to discharge their important duties with even greater effectiveness and give them more time to travel and teach.

A preliminary survey of the conditions affecting the construction of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Latin America, one of the two edifices to be erected during the Plan, has already been undertaken, and we now invite Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í architects to submit designs for the Panama Temple. The terms and conditions of the submission, and the specifications of the structure, may be obtained from the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, whose choice of design will be subject to the ultimate approval of the Universal House of Justice. It is our hope that the construction of this sacred House of Worship, in a location accorded such special significance by both the Master and the Guardian, will be speedily accomplished, so that its beacon of spiritual light may radiate to all the Americas.

During the past twelve months the following new territories have been opened to the Faith: in the continent of Africa, Gabon, Ifni, Mali, Mauritania, Rodrigues Island and Upper Volta; in the continent of America, Aruba Island, Cozumel Island, Guadeloupe, Las Mujeres Island, Prince of Wales Island and St. Vincent; in the continent of Asia, the Ryukyu Islands; in the continent of Australasia, the Line Islands; in the continent of Europe, the Isle of Wight, the East and West Frisian Islands. The following territories have been re-opened: in the continent of Africa, Mafia Island; in the continent of America, Antigua, French Guiana and Martinique; West Irian in the continent of Asia; and Admiralty Islands in Australasia. National Hazíratu'l-Quds have been acquired in nine places, the seats of National Spiritual Assemblies, and land has been acquired in two others on

which to build this institution. Six National Spiritual Assemblies have become incorporated and the Faith has been recognized in Cambodia, a country destined to have its own National Spiritual Assembly during the Nine Year Plan. National Endowments have been acquired in eight countries; six Teaching Institutes have been established, and land has been acquired for six others; a Bahá'í Publishing Trust for the provision of literature in the French language has been established in Brussels; Bahá'í Holy Days have been recognized in three territories; Bahá'í literature has been published in the following eleven new languages: Ibibio-Efik in the continent of Africa, Aguacateca, Athabaskan, Carina and Motilon-Yukpa in the continent of America, Kenyah, Melanau and Temiar in the continent of Asia, and Ghari, Marshallese and Motua in Australasia. The progress of the Cause in Borneo makes possible the achievement of a goal supplementary to the Plan, namely the establishment at Riḍván 1966 of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brunei.

The passage of the first year of the Plan discloses two conditions in the Bahá'í World community. The first, within the Faith itself, is its capacity to accomplish all and any definitive goals assigned to it, goals such as the purchasing of Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple Sites, Endowments, or the incorporation of Spiritual Assemblies; such objective and highly important goals as these, by which the Cause is established physically, legally and socially in the world, are now taken in its stride by the Administrative Order. It should be noted, moreover, that the accomplishment of many goals of this type, involves inter-Assembly co-operation, an international activity vital to the development of world order.

The second condition apparent after the passage of the first year of the Plan, involves the relationship of the Cause to humanity. Almost universally there is a sense of an impending breakthrough in large-scale conversion. Reports of the Hands of the Cause and of Board members constantly mention it; many National Spiritual Assemblies believe that they have reached the shores of this ocean. And, indeed, entry into the Cause by troops has been a fact in some areas for a number of years. But greater things are ahead. The teaching of the Faith must enkindle a world-encircling fire in whose light the Cause and the world—protagonists of the greatest drama in human history—

are clearly illumined. Destiny is carrying us to this climax; we must gird ourselves for heroism.

Four challenging and immediate tasks present themselves. The first is to raise and dispatch, during the coming year, no less than four hundred and sixty pioneers who will open the fifty-four remaining virgin territories of the Plan, re-settle the eighteen unoccupied ones, re-inforce areas where the numbers and cohesion of the Bahá'í communities are at present inadequate to launch effective teaching plans, and support and extend the work in the areas of mass teaching. Let every believer consider this challenge, be he, in the words of the beloved Guardian, "in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor, whether veteran or newly enrolled . . ."

To assist the pioneer efforts of the friends and their transfer to their posts during the next twelve months we announce the formation of five Continental Pioneer Committees, namely: Pioneer Committee for Africa appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles; Pioneer Committee for the Americas appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States; Pioneer Committee for Asia appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Persia; Pioneer Committee for Australasia appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia; Pioneer Committee for Europe appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany.

These Committees will in no way infringe the responsibilities of other Pioneer Committees, or of National Spiritual Assemblies, who are in charge of the teaching work, and under whose jurisdiction they will function. They are established to facilitate and assist the work of these national bodies by providing effective exchange of vital information, both continentally and inter-continently, by assisting in the routing of pioneer offers and in the transfer of pioneers to their posts.

A careful estimate has been made of the pioneer needs of every area during the next twelve months and the result, including those for the

seventy-two areas mentioned above, is a call for four hundred and sixty-one pioneers; eighty-six for Africa, ninety-six for the Americas, one hundred and ninety-one for Asia, twenty-nine for Australasia, and fifty-nine for Europe. Each National Spiritual Assembly has been consulted as to its pioneer needs and these have been made known to all National Spiritual Assemblies as well as to the five Continental Pioneer Committees, who will be kept currently informed of progress by the National Spiritual Assemblies. The friends, therefore, are urged to consult their National Spiritual Assemblies for information about pioneer needs and responsibilities both of their own communities and in general.

For the first time in Bahá'í history, an International Deputization Fund has been established at the World Centre under the administration of the Universal House of Justice. From it supplementary support will be given to specific pioneering projects when other funds are not available. All friends, and particularly those who are unable to respond to the pioneer call, are invited to support this Fund, mindful of the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, "Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, Whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded".

The second challenge facing us is to raise the intensity of teaching to a pitch never before attained, in order to realize that "vast increase" called for in the Plan. Universal participation and constant action will win this goal. Every believer has a part to play, and is capable of playing it, for every soul meets others, and, as promised by Bahá'u'lláh, "Whosoever ariseth to aid Our Cause God will render him victorious . . ." The confusion of the world is not diminishing, rather does it increase with each passing day, and men and women are losing faith in human remedies. Realization is at last dawning that "There is no place to flee to" save God. Now is the golden opportunity; people are willing, in many places eager, to listen to the divine remedy.

The third challenge is to acquire as rapidly as possible all the remaining National Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple Sites, National Endowments and Teaching Institutes called for in the Plan. The speedy conclusion of these projects will save tremendous expense later and endow the Faith with increasingly valuable properties. These basic possessions are the embryos of mighty institutions of the future, but it is this generation, which, for its own protection and as its gift to posterity, must acquire them. We call upon the National Spiritual Assemblies charged with responsibility in this field to accord it high priority. A further, but equally important consideration, is, that the achievement of this goal in the early years of the Plan will liberate the energies and resources of the growing world community for a concentrated, resolute and relentless pursuit in its later stages of great victories whose foundations are now being laid.

The fourth challenge is to prepare national and local plans for the befitting celebration of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation of His Message in September/October, 1867 to the kings and rulers of the world, celebrations to be followed during the remainder of the Nine Year Plan by a sustained and well-planned programme of proclamation of that same Message to the generality of mankind.

A review of the historic proclamation by Bahá'u'lláh, as described by Shoghi Effendi in "God Passes By", reveals that its "opening notes" were "sounded during the latter part of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Adrianople", and that, six years later, it "closed during the early years of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of 'Akká". These "opening notes" were the mighty and awe-inspiring words addressed by Him to the kings and rulers collectively in the Súriy-i-Mulúk, "the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh". It was penned some time during the months of September and October, 1867, and was followed by "Tablets unnumbered . . . in which the implications of His newly-asserted claims were fully expounded". "Kings and emperors, severally and collectively; the chief magistrates of the Republics of the American continent; ministers and ambassadors; the Sovereign Pontiff himself; the Vicar of the Prophet of Islam; the royal Trustee of the Kingdom of the Hidden Imam; the monarchs of Christendom, its patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks; the recognized leaders of both the Sunni and Shi'ah sacerdotal orders;

the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion; the philosophers, the ecclesiastical leaders, the wise men and the inhabitants of Constantinople—that proud seat of both the Sultanate and the Caliphate; the entire company of the professed adherents of the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian and Muslim Faiths; the people of the Bayán; the wise men of the world, its men of letters, its poets, its mystics, its tradesmen, the elected representatives of its peoples; His own countrymen”; all were “brought directly within the purview of the exhortations, the warnings, the appeals, the declarations and the prophecies which constitute the theme of His momentous summons to the leaders of mankind . . .” “Unique and stupendous as was this proclamation, it proved to be but a prelude to a still mightier revelation of the creative power of its Author, and to what may well rank as the most signal act of His ministry—the promulgation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”. In this, the Most Holy Book, revealed in 1873, Bahá’u’lláh not only once more announces to the kings of the earth collectively that “He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared” but addresses reigning sovereigns distinctively by name and proclaims to the “Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein” that “the Promised One hath appeared”. Such was the proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh to mankind. As He Himself testified, “Never since the beginning of the world hath the Message been so openly proclaimed”.

The celebration of this fate-laden centenary period will open with a visit, in September 1967, on the Feast of Mashíyyat, by a few appointed representatives of the Bahá’í World to the site of the house in Adrianople, where the historic Súriy-i-Mulúk was revealed.

Immediately following this joyful and pious act, six Inter-Continental Conferences will be simultaneously held during the month of October in Panama City, Wilmette, Sydney, Kampala, Frankfurt, and New Delhi. The host and convenor of each Conference will be the National Spiritual Assembly in whose area it takes place. The following Hands of the Cause of God will represent the Universal House of Justice at these Conferences: Panama City—Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, who will, on that occasion, lay the foundation stone of the Temple; Wilmette—Leroy Ioas; Sydney—Ugo Giachery; Kampala—‘Alí Akbar Furútan; Frankfurt—Paul Haney; New Delhi—Abu’l-Qásim Faizi.

All National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to arrange befitting observances, on a national and local scale, of the opening of the centenary period during September/October, 1967, and between the above Conferences and Ridván 1968, at which time the second International Convention for the election of the Universal House of Justice will be held at the World Centre.

The successful carrying out of all these plans will constitute a befitting commemoration, commensurate with the resources of the Bahá'í World community, of the sacred event they recall.

These six Conferences, like the epoch-making event whose centenary they commemorate, will sound the “opening notes” of a period of proclamation of the Cause of God extending through the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan to the centenary, in 1973, of the Revelation of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, an activity which calls for the ardent and imaginative study of all National and Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

The international scene will witness the holding of Oceanic Conferences forecast by Shoghi Effendi. The first one will be held during August 1968 on an island in the Mediterranean Sea to commemorate Bahá'u'lláh's voyage upon that sea, a hundred years before, from Gallipoli in Turkey to the Most Great Prison in 'Akká. In the subsequent years of the Nine Year Plan, others will be held in the Atlantic Ocean, in the Caribbean Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean.

In calling upon all National Spiritual Assemblies to consider now the appointment of National Proclamation Committees charged with laying feasible and effective plans for the proclamation of the Faith throughout the entire centenary period, we can do no better than call attention to the following passage from a letter written by our beloved Guardian in connection with the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of the Bahá'í Era:

An unprecedented, a carefully conceived, efficiently co-ordinated, nation-wide campaign, aiming at the proclamation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, through speeches, articles in the press, and radio broadcasts, should be promptly initiated and vigorously prosecuted. The universality of the Faith, its aims and purposes, episodes in its dramatic history, testimonials to its transforming power, and the character and distinguishing features of its World Order should be emphasized and explained to the general public, and particularly to eminent friends and leaders sympathetic to its cause, who should be approached and invited to participate in the celebrations. Lectures, conferences, banquets, special publications should, to whatever extent is practicable and according to the resources at the disposal of the believers, proclaim the character of this joyous Festival.

The majestic process launched by our beloved Guardian in 1953, when he called the widely-scattered, obscure Bahá'í World community to embark upon that first, glorious, world-encompassing crusade, is gathering momentum, and posterity may well gaze with awe upon the development, by so small a fraction of the human race and in a world entangled in opposition, enmity and disruption, of the very pattern and sinews of world order. This divinely-propelled and long-promised development must continue its historic course until its final consummation in the glories and splendours of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1966

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1966

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the revelation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in March and April 1916, of the first Tablets of the Divine Plan, has witnessed the conclusion of a feat of pioneering unparalleled in the annals of the Cause. A year ago the call was raised for four-hundred-and-sixty-one pioneers to leave their homes within twelve months and scatter throughout the planet to broaden and strengthen the foundations of the world community of Bahá'u'lláh. There is every hope that with the exception of thirty-four posts whose settlement is dependent upon favourable circumstances all the pioneer goals will be filled by Riḍván or their settlement will be assured by firm commitments. The gratitude and admiration of the entire Bahá'í world go out to this noble band of dedicated believers who have so gloriously responded to the call. These pioneers, who have arisen for the specified goals, have been reinforced by a further forty-five believers who have settled in the goal territories, while sixty-nine more have left their homes to reside in twenty-six other countries already opened to the Faith. All told, in the course of the year, five-hundred-and-five Bahá'ís have arisen to pioneer beyond their homelands, the largest number ever to do so in any one year in the entire history of the Cause.

This is a resounding victory, and in the light of the Master's statement in the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, "It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation," of wonderful portent for the future. Its immediate results are the opening of twenty-four new territories to the Faith, the resettlement of four others, and the consolidation of ninety-three more. The newly-opened territories are: Chad and Niger in Africa; Alaskan Peninsula, Barbuda, Cayman Islands, Chiloé Island, Providencia Island, Quintana Roo Territory, Saba, St. Andrés Island, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lawrence Island, Tierra del Fuego, and Turks and Caicos Islands in the Americas; Laccadive Islands and Marmara Island in Asia; Niue Island in Australasia; and Bornholm, Capri, Elba, Gotland, Inner Hebrides, and Ischia in Europe.

The re-settled territories are: Corisco Island and Spanish Guinea in Africa and Maldivé Islands and Nicobar Islands in Asia.

As announced last Ridván, the first Convention of the Bahá'ís of Brunei will be held this year, during the second week-end of the Ridván period, when the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brunei will be elected. Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone will represent the World Centre of the Faith on this historic occasion.

A further result of the confirmations which have rewarded the tremendous teaching effort of the past two years is the call now made by the House of Justice for the formation at Ridván 1967 of the following nine National Spiritual Assemblies: in Africa—the National Spiritual Assembly of Algeria and Tunisia with its seat in Algiers; the National Spiritual Assembly of Cameroon Republic with its seat in Victoria and with Spanish Guinea, Fernando Po, Corisco and Sao Tomé and Príncipe Islands assigned to it; the National Spiritual Assembly of Swaziland, Mozambique and Basutoland with its seat in Mbabane; the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia with its seat in Lusaka. In the Americas—the National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands with its seat in Charlotte Amalie. In Asia—the National Spiritual Assembly of Cambodia with its seat in Phnom Penh; the National Spiritual Assembly of Eastern

and Southern Arabia with its seat in Bahrain; the National Spiritual Assembly of Taiwan with its seat in Taipei. In Australasia—the National Spiritual Assembly of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands with its seat in Tarawa. These nine new National Spiritual Assemblies constituting, together with the new National Spiritual Assembly of Brunei, ten additional pillars of the Universal House of Justice, will bring to seventy-nine the number which will take part during Ridván 1968 in the second International Convention for the election of that Institution.

This momentous year cannot be allowed to pass without mention of the tireless and dedicated services of the beloved Hands of the Cause, the Standard-Bearers of the Nine Year Plan, and the able support rendered them by their Auxiliary Boards. The special missions which they have discharged on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, the teaching tours they have undertaken, the conferences they have organized, their constant work at the World Centre, and above all their never-ending encouragement of the friends and watchfulness over the welfare of the Cause of God, have given distinction and effective leadership to the work of the entire community. The grievous loss which they sustained in the passing of Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas is shared by the whole Bahá'í world.

The splendid achievements in the pioneering and teaching fields, together with the enthusiastic attention given to the preparation of plans for the befitting celebration of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation of His Message to the kings and rulers of the world, have sealed with success the first, and opened the way for the second phase of the Nine Year Plan, a phase in which the Bahá'í world must prepare and arm itself for the third phase, beginning in October 1967 when the six intercontinental conferences will sound the “opening notes” of a period of proclamation of the Cause of God extending through the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan to the centenary, in 1973, of the revelation of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”. The three-fold purpose of these conferences is to commemorate the centenary of the opening of Bahá'u'lláh's Own proclamation of His Mission, to proclaim the Divine Message, and to deliberate upon the tasks of the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan.

Five specific tasks face the Bahá'í world as it enters this second phase of the Plan:

The first is to complete the settlement of the pioneers, and the dispatch of others wherever needed.

The second is intensive preparation for the third phase of the Plan through development of new teaching measures and expansion of the various Bahá'í funds at international, national and local levels.

The third is acceleration of the provision of Bahá'í literature, particularly its translation and publication in those languages in which, as yet, none has been published or the supply is inadequate.

The fourth is the acquisition of the remaining national Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites, national endowments and teaching institutes called for in the Plan, before the developing inflation now affecting nearly the whole world adds too greatly to the financial burden of acquiring these properties.

The fifth is development of the Panama Temple Fund. The Universal House of Justice is initiating this Fund with a contribution of \$25,000, and now calls upon the believers and Bahá'í communities to contribute liberally and continuously until the funds for the completion of this historic structure are assured. Such contributions should be sent directly to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. More than fifty designs have been received, and the House of Justice is now considering the recommendations of the National Assembly. The choice will be announced and the friends will be kept fully informed of the progress of this highly significant and inspiring project.

Every individual follower of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the institutions of the Faith, at local, national, continental and world levels, must now meet the challenge to raise the intensity of teaching to a pitch never before attained, in order to realize that vast increase called for in the

Plan. For those believers living in countries where they have freedom to teach their Faith, this challenge is the more sharply pointed by the oppressive measures imposed on the Faith elsewhere. In Persia the believers are denied their elementary rights and the Faith is still largely proscribed. In 'Iraq the national and one local Hazíratu'l-Quds have been seized and the activities of the friends severely restricted. In Egypt Bahá'í properties are still confiscated and recently several believers were imprisoned for a period, and are now awaiting trial. New oppression has broken out in Indonesia where the national Hazíratu'l-Quds has been seized and organized activities of the believers have been forbidden. In yet other countries the believers are subject to restrictions and surveillance. The friends in all cases are steadfast and confident, looking forward to their emancipation and the eventual triumph of the Cause.

The challenge to the local and national administrative institutions of the Faith is to organize and promote the teaching work through systematic plans, involving not only the regular fireside meetings in the homes of the believers, the public meetings, receptions and conferences, the week-end, summer and winter schools, the youth conferences and activities, all of which are so vigorously upheld at present, but in addition through a constant stream of visiting teachers to every locality. The forces released by this latter process have been extolled by Bahá'u'lláh in these words:

The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world. In the Books of old the station of them that have voyaged far and near in order to guide the servants of God hath been set forth and written down, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, says:

Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world . . .

Such plans must be initiated and developed now, during this period of preparation, so that they may be fully operative by the beginning of

the proclamation period from which time they must be relentlessly pursued until the end of the Plan.

The Universal House of Justice attaches such importance to this principle of travelling teaching that it has decided to develop it internationally, and now calls for volunteers to offer their services in this field. By their visits to lands other than their own, these friends will lend a tremendous stimulus to the proclamation and teaching of the Cause in all continents. It is hoped that such projects will be self-supporting, since the International Deputization Fund will still be needed for pioneering. However, when a proposal which is considered to be of special benefit to the Faith cannot be financed by the individual or the receiving National Assemblies, the House of Justice will consider a request for assistance from the Deputization Fund. Offers, which may be for any period, should be made to one's own National Spiritual Assembly or to the Continental Pioneer Committees, which have been given the additional task of assisting National Assemblies to implement and co-ordinate this new enterprise. Let those who arise recall the Master's injunction to "travel like 'Abdu'l-Bahá . . . sanctified and free from every attachment and in the utmost severance".

Simultaneous and co-equal with this vast, ordered and ever-growing teaching effort, the work of consolidation must go hand in hand. In fact these two processes must be regarded as inseparable parts of the expansion of the Faith. While the work of teaching inevitably goes first, to pursue it alone without consolidation would leave the community unprepared to receive the masses who must sooner or later respond to the life-giving message of the Cause. The guidance of our beloved Guardian in this vital matter is, as ever, clear and unambiguous: "Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá'í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development. From this vital, this ever-present need attention must, at no time, be diverted; nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the no less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Bahá'í administrative institutions." A proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development must, from now on, as we enter the era of large-scale

conversion, be maintained by the Bahá'í Community. Consolidation must comprise not only the establishment of Bahá'í administrative institutions, but a true deepening in the fundamental verities of the Cause and in its spiritual principles, understanding of its prime purpose in the establishment of the unity of mankind, instruction in its standards of behaviour in all aspects of private and public life, in the particular practice of Bahá'í life in such things as daily prayer, education of children, observance of the laws of Bahá'í marriage, abstention from politics, the obligation to contribute to the Fund, the importance of the Nineteen Day Feast and opportunity to acquire a sound knowledge of the present-day practice of Bahá'í administration.

The onward march of the Faith requires, and is indeed dependent upon, a very great increase in contributions to the various funds. All the goals assigned to the World Centre of the Faith, and particularly those dealing with the development and beautification of the properties surrounding the Holy Shrines and the extension of the gardens on Mount Carmel entail heavy expenditures. The building of the two Temples called for in the Plan will require further large sums, and the world-wide process of teaching and consolidation now to be intensified must be sustained by a greatly increased and uninterrupted flow of funds. The International Deputization Fund must be maintained and expanded, not only for further pioneering needs, but in order to assist and develop the travelling teacher programme now called for. Since only those who have openly proclaimed their recognition of Bahá'u'lláh are permitted to contribute financially to the establishment of His World Order, it is apparent that more, much more is required from the few now so privileged. Our responsibilities in this field are very great, commensurate indeed with the bounty of being the bearers of the Name of God in this day.

The challenge to the individual Bahá'í in every field of service, but above all in teaching the Cause of God is never-ending. With every fresh affliction visited upon mankind our inescapable duty becomes more apparent, nor should we ever forget that if we neglect this duty, "others" in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world". Now, it seems, we may well be entering an era of the longed-for

expansion of our beloved Faith. Mankind's growing hunger for spiritual truth is our opportunity. While reaching forth to grasp it we would do well to ponder the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Your behaviour towards your neighbour should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be re-created by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory.

As humanity plunges deeper into that condition of which Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly", so must the believers increasingly stand out as assured, orientated and fundamentally happy beings, conforming to a standard which, in direct contrast to the ignoble and amoral attitudes of modern society, is the source of their honour, strength and maturity. It is this marked contrast between the vigour, unity and discipline of the Bahá'í community on the one hand, and the increasing confusion, despair and feverish tempo of a doomed society on the other, which, during the turbulent years ahead will draw the eyes of humanity to the sanctuary of Bahá'u'lláh's world-redeeming Faith.

The constant progress of the Cause of God is a source of joy to us all and a stimulus to further action. But not ordinary action. Heroic deeds are now called for such as are performed only by divinely-sustained and detached souls. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Commander of the hosts of the Lord, in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, uttered this cry: "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." And He concluded with this heart-shaking appeal, "Please God, ye may achieve it."

The Universal House of Justice

April 1967

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1967

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

At the conclusion of the third year of the Nine Year Plan we acknowledge with thankful hearts the evidences of Divine favour with which Bahá'u'lláh unfailingly sustains and confirms the dedicated efforts of His servants everywhere, and we unhesitatingly affirm our confidence that the community of the Most Great Name can and will, by its determination and sacrificial efforts, achieve complete victory.

Last year the call was raised for the formation, in 1967, of eleven new National Spiritual Assemblies. All will be elected during the Riḍván period. We welcome with great joy the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Algeria and Tunisia with its seat in Algiers; Cameroon Republic with its seat in Victoria; Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique with its seat in Mbabane; Zambia with its seat in Lusaka; Belize with its seat in Belize; the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands with its seat in Charlotte Amalie; Eastern and Southern Arabia with its seat in Bahrain; Laos with its seat in Vientiane; Sikkim with its seat in Gangtok; Taiwan with its seat in Taipei; the Gilbert and Ellice Islands with its seat in Tarawa. The World Centre of the Faith will be represented at each National Convention by a Hand of the Cause of God, who will present a message from the Universal House of Justice welcoming the new national community and assigning it its share of the goals of the Nine Year Plan.

At this Ridván eighty-one of the 108 National Spiritual Assemblies, and more than six thousand of the 13,737 Local Spiritual Assemblies called for by 1973 will have been established; of a required 54,102 localities where Bahá'ís reside, 28,217 are reported; fifteen of the sixty-five National Incorporations called for have been achieved; seventeen of fifty-two National Hazíratu'l-Quds, seven of sixty-two Temple sites, thirteen of fifty-four National Endowments, fourteen of thirty-two Teaching Institutes, have been acquired; of the 973 Local Incorporations called for in the Plan, 123 have been completed; Local Hazíratu'l-Quds acquired are, twenty-four in India, seventeen in Kenya, nine in Uganda, two in South Africa, two in Turkey and a number in Congo (Kinshasa), while land for eight others has been acquired in Kenya, for four in Cameroon, for two in Pakistan and for one in Mauritius; in eight countries Local Endowments supplementary to those called for in the Plan have been acquired.

Iceland, Korea, Liberia, Luxembourg and Rhodesia now recognize the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate; the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Hawaii, Iceland, Italy, Kenya and Luxembourg recognize Bahá'í Holy Days. A Summer School has been established in Liberia, and one, beyond the requirements of the Plan, in Canada, while land for others has been acquired in Argentina, Ethiopia and Samoa. Twenty-five new languages have been added to the list of those in which Bahá'í literature is available, bringing the total number to 397. The number of territories now opened to the Faith has reached 311, including the recently settled virgin areas of Chiloé Archipelago, Bonaire, Phoenix Islands and St. Martin, and two territories in addition to those called for in the Plan, namely Melville Island in Australasia and Montserrat in the Windward Islands.

After protracted frustration the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia has finally gained possession of the historic fortress of Chihríq, that bleak and lonely citadel which was the last earthly residence of the blessed Báb, and from which He was led forth to His martyrdom in Tabriz. Realization of the long-sought recognition of the Faith in Italy is a wonderful victory, resulting not only in the incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly, but also of all Local Spiritual Assemblies in Italy and the ability to establish that National Spiritual Assembly's Publishing Trust. In Iceland the Faith has been

recognized as one of the island's religions. This provides not only for incorporation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Reykjavik but authorizes the chairman of that Assembly to perform Bahá'í marriages and Bahá'í burials, exempts the Faith from certain taxes, permits the observance of Bahá'í Holy Days and paves the way for incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly of that country when it will be formed. The full number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Groups and Localities called for in the Plan has been established in fifty-three territories and islands under the direction of twenty-six National Spiritual Assemblies; five territories have formed the required number of Local Spiritual Assemblies and seven have reached the specified number of Localities.

Since the call was raised a year ago, international travelling-teaching, ranging over the five continents and affecting nearly all national communities, has been undertaken. Seventy-eight projects have been completed in Europe, forty-three in America, twenty-seven in Asia, twenty-five in Australasia which, with those in Africa brings the total number to about two hundred. It is greatly hoped that this stimulating activity, so dear to the beloved Master's heart, will be constantly expanded.

Sustaining all these visible achievements is a constant activity throughout the world of teaching and administration—a perpetual movement, like the ceaseless surge of the sea, within the Bahá'í community, which is the real cause of its growth. National and Local Spiritual Assemblies facing difficult problems, devising new plans, shouldering responsibility for a community growing in numbers and consciousness, Committees striving to accomplish objectives, Bahá'í Youth in eager and dedicated activity, individual Bahá'ís and families making efforts for the Cause, to give the Message, or hold a fireside, these constant services attract the confirmation of Bahá'u'lláh, and the more they are supported by prayers and intense dedication and the more extensive they become, the more they release into the world a spiritual charge which no force on earth can resist, and which must eventually bring about the complete triumph of the Cause. It is this organic vitality of the Faith, so readily felt at the World Centre, whose exhilaration we wish every believer to share.

At the World Centre of the Faith codification of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” and collation of other important Texts has continued. Work on the highly important task of formulating the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice is well advanced. Development and extension of the gardens surrounding the sacred Shrines in both Haifa and Bahjí is continuing. Publication of “The Bahá’í World” Volume XIII has been undertaken; this book covers nine years, from 1954 to 1963, almost the entire period of the Ten Year Crusade, and includes a comprehensive article on the beloved Guardian by Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. A planned development of relationships with the United Nations is being actively pursued. An important supplementary achievement is the establishment of an International Bahá’í Audio-Visual Centre whose function is to provide teaching and deepening aids to all National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as to store and index audio-visual records.

Throughout the year the services of the beloved Hands of the Cause have shone with an unfailing light. Their constant encouragement of National Spiritual Assemblies and of believers everywhere to pursue the goals of the Plan and to obtain a deeper understanding of the true meaning of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is contributing in no small measure to the progress of that Plan and must exercise a lasting effect on the development of the Bahá’í community. These few gallant and dedicated believers, whose place in history is forever assured by virtue of their appointment to their high office, are indeed a precious legacy left to us by our beloved Guardian, and as the years go by there is increasingly added to the honour and respect which is their due by reason of their exalted rank, the love and admiration of the friends evoked by their constant services.

In response to special needs two changes have been made in the disposition of the Hands during the year, Hand of the Cause John Robarts returning to the Western Hemisphere with a special assignment to his native Canada, and Hand of the Cause William Sears returning to Africa. In addition we are delighted to announce that Hand of the Cause Tarazu’lláh Samandari, whose eyes were blessed by beholding Bahá’u’lláh, will represent the Universal House of Justice at the Inter-Continental Conference in Chicago, replacing the late Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas.

In the international sphere the great project of raising the Panama Temple has begun with choice of a design submitted by Mr. Peter Tillotson, an English architect. Mr. Robert McLaughlin, sometime member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Dean Emeritus of the School of Architecture of Princeton University, who served as a member of the Technical Advisory Board for the construction of the interior of the Mother Temple of the West in Wilmette, has been appointed Architectural Consultant to the Universal House of Justice for the building of the Temple. He and Mr. Tillotson have visited the site together, and are working in close co-operation. Pictures and drawings of the new Temple will be published shortly, and the friends will be kept informed of the progress of construction of this House of Worship “situated between the two great oceans”, a location which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicated would become very important in the future and whence the Teachings, once established, “will unite the East and the West, the North and the South.”

The brilliant pioneering feat of the second year of the Plan is beginning to reveal its beneficent effects, but pioneers are still urgently needed and will continue to be needed in all parts of the world for consolidation and development of the Faith in the newly won territories as well as for those resettled during the opening years of the Plan. The immediate requirement is for 209 pioneers to settle in eighty-seven territories named on the attached list, and the call is now raised for the speedy achievement of this task. Service in this highly meritorious field is open to every believer and all those who are moved to respond to this particular call are asked to consult the list of territories and to make their offers to their own National Spiritual Assembly. Full details of the requirements in each territory have been sent to the National Spiritual Assemblies concerned and to the Pioneer Committees.

The constant need for pioneers no less than the approaching world-wide proclamation render it imperative to pay special attention, in every continent, to the homefronts, for they are the sources of manpower and of administrative experience, the solid bases from which all expansion begins, both at home and abroad. The largest increases in numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies, of Groups, and

of believers, are called for on the homefronts, and these tasks must be vigorously pursued. Some National Spiritual Assemblies have phased these important goals, assigning a specified number for achievement each year, thus ensuring a planned and flexible approach to the total requirements. Such a systematic and determined prosecution of the homefront goals is highly recommended.

The pressing and ever-growing needs of the Bahá'í Fund are called to the attention of all believers. There are great projects already under way or lying ahead which require very large amounts of money for their realization. The Panama Temple—the first only of the two called for in the Nine Year Plan—the beautification and development of the World Centre itself, involving a necessary and inevitable increase in facilities to serve the growing needs of the Faith; support of the vital teaching programme in many parts of the world; establishment and development of new National Spiritual Assemblies—all these urgently require the support of the friends everywhere through sustained and sacrificial contributions. As inflation spreads around the world, the consequent increase in the cost of living is balanced, at least in the more affluent countries, by a corresponding increase in personal incomes. The expenses of the Bahá'í Fund are inevitably and seriously affected by this inflationary condition which can only be relieved by contributions, both of larger amounts and from a larger number of contributors. The House of Justice believes that the financial needs of the Cause should be met by universal participation in giving and urges National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to pursue this goal with vigour and imagination, recalling to the friends the plea of the beloved Guardian to every believer “unhesitatingly, to place, each according to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Bahá'í sacrifice.” The fact that only we, the Bahá'ís, can contribute financially to the Cause is both our honour and our challenge.

As we approach the third phase of the Nine Year Plan there opens before us a prospect of enthralling opportunities such as to thrill the heart of every ardent follower of Bahá'u'lláh. For more than a century we have toiled to teach the Cause; heroic sacrifices, dedicated services, prodigious efforts have been made in order to establish the outposts of the Faith in the chief countries, territories and islands of the earth and to raise the framework of the Administrative Order

around the planet. But the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh remains, as yet, unknown to the generality of men. Now at last, at long last, the world-wide community of the Most Great Name is called upon to launch, on a global scale and to every stratum of human society, an enduring and intensive proclamation of the healing message that the Promised One has come and that the unity and well-being of the human race is the purpose of His Revelation. This long-to-be-sustained campaign, commencing next October in commemoration of the centenary of the sounding of the “opening notes” of Bahá'u'lláh's own proclamation, and gathering momentum throughout the remainder of the Nine Year Plan, may well become the spearhead of other plans to be launched continually until humanity has recognized and gratefully acclaimed its Redeemer and its Lord.

A hundred years ago Bahá'u'lláh Himself addressed the kings, rulers, religious leaders and peoples of the world. The Universal House of Justice feels it its bounden duty to bring that Message to the attention of the world's leaders today. It is therefore presenting to them, in the form of a book, the essence of Bahá'u'lláh's announcement. Entitled “The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh”, a special edition will be presented to Heads of State during the opening of the proclamation period and a general edition will be available to the friends in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The Hands of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, Ugo Giachery, Tarazu'llah Samandari, ‘Alí Akbar Furútan, Paul Haney, Abu'l-Qásim Faizi, who will represent the Universal House of Justice at the Inter-Continental Conferences in October to be held in Panama, Sydney, Chicago, Kampala, Frankfurt and New Delhi respectively, will gather at the World Centre in September, a few days before the Feast of Mashíyyat. The members of the House of Justice will join these Hands in supplication at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí and will meet with them for consultation in the Mansion. From that Holy Spot these Hands of the Cause will make a special pilgrimage on behalf of the entire Bahá'í world to Adrianople where the Súriy-i-Mulúk was revealed. One hundred years after the historic event which it is their purpose to commemorate, they will, on September 27th gather in the House of Bahá'u'lláh for prayer and meditation, while the members of the Universal House of Justice will,

in the Most Holy Shrine at Bahjí, share in the same commemoration and pray for the success of the Conferences and of the Proclamation programme. The entire Bahá'í world will, between the Conferences and Ridván 1968, commemorate the centenary of the opening of that wonderful period in human history when the clouds of Divine bounty showered in lavish profusion their treasures upon men and the portals of the Kingdom were thrown open, disclosing to all who had eyes to see, a new heaven and a new earth, and the new Jerusalem coming down from God.

Immediately after the Feast of Mashíyyat the Hands of the Cause will travel from Adrianople to their Conferences, each bearing the precious trust of a photograph of the Blessed Beauty, which it will be the privilege of those attending the Conferences to view. These distinguished Hands will, on their own behalf, each address the Conference which they attend, and will bear a message to each Conference from the Universal House of Justice whom they represent.

These six Conferences, convened to commemorate the opening of Bahá'u'lláh's own Proclamation and to inaugurate a period of proclamation of His message by the entire company of His followers, will doubtless demonstrate yet again the spirit of joy which pervades such gatherings of the friends and will reinforce them in their determination to seize whatever means and opportunities they may find to raise the Divine call. Honoured by the presence of Hands of the Cause, these Conferences, focal points of the love and prayers of the friends everywhere, magnets to attract the spiritual powers which alone can confirm their work, will, it is confidently hoped, be potent sources of unity, spiritual enthusiasm and realistic planning. National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to ensure that they are represented at the Conference held in their continent so that they may share their plans for proclamation with other National Spiritual Assemblies as well as discuss with them the remaining goals of the Nine Year Plan.

To all those friends in so many countries, suffering in varying degrees from restrictions and oppression which will either prevent altogether,

or greatly inhibit their public commemoration and subsequent proclamation programmes, we send a special message of love and assurance. To them we convey the love and admiration of their fellow believers, who, in gratitude for their greater freedom, are determined to blaze abroad such a proclamation of the Divine Message as may well pave the way for the eventual emancipation of the entire body of the Faith.

World-wide proclamation, the unknown sea on which we must soon sail, will add another dimension to our work, a dimension which will, as it develops, complement and reinforce the twin processes of expansion and consolidation. This pattern of teaching, emerging so soon after the completion of the framework of the Administrative Order, may well be the means of advancing the vital work of consolidation and of rendering more effective the teaching wisdom which has been gained in a hundred years, and more particularly since the beloved Guardian called us to systematic and planned activity. Therefore, in those countries where we are free to publicize our religion, this activity must become part of our regular work, included in budgets, assigned to National and Local Committees for study and implementation and above all for co-ordination with the programmes operating to achieve the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Every effort of proclamation must be sustained by teaching, particularly locally where public announcements should be related to such efforts. This co-ordination is essential, for nothing will be more disheartening than for thousands to hear of the Faith and have nowhere to turn for further information.

The beloved Guardian wrote, “To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavour of each one of its loyal adherents.”, a statement which places the obligation of deepening in the Cause firmly on every believer. It is therefore upon the nature of deepening, rather than upon the desirability of pursuing it, that we wish to comment.

A detailed and exact knowledge of the present structure of Bahá'í Administration, or of the By-laws of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, or of the many and varied applications of Bahá'í law under the diverse conditions prevailing around the world, while valuable in itself, cannot be regarded as the sort of knowledge primarily intended by deepening. Rather is suggested a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man, and particularly of His immediate purpose as revealed and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, a purpose as far removed from current concepts of human well-being and happiness as is possible. We should constantly be on our guard lest the glitter and tinsel of an affluent society should lead us to think that such superficial adjustments to the modern world as are envisioned by humanitarian movements or are publicly proclaimed as the policy of enlightened statesmanship—such as an extension to all members of the human race of the benefits of a high standard of living, of education, medical care, technical knowledge—will of themselves fulfill the glorious mission of Bahá'u'lláh. Far otherwise. These are the things which shall be added unto us once we seek the Kingdom of God, and are not themselves the objectives for which the Báb gave His life, Bahá'u'lláh endured such sufferings as none before Him had ever endured, the Master and after Him the Guardian bore their trials and afflictions with such superhuman fortitude. Far deeper and more fundamental was their vision, penetrating to the very purpose of human life. We cannot do better, in this respect, than call to the attention of the friends certain themes pursued by Shoghi Effendi in his trenchant statement “The Goal of a New World Order”. “The principle of the Oneness of Mankind” he writes, “implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.” Referring to the “epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization”, he states that “. . . they cannot but appear, when viewed in their proper perspective, except as subsidiary adjustments preluding that transformation of unparalleled majesty and scope which humanity is in this age bound to undergo.” In a later document he refers to the civilization to be established by Bahá'u'lláh as one “with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive.”

Dearly-loved Friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human

race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by “a new race of men”? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study classes for its constant consideration, and as reinforcement to their effort, let them remember conscientiously the requirements of daily prayer and reading of the Word of God enjoined upon all Bahá’ís by Bahá’u’lláh.

Such dedicated striving on the part of all the friends to deepen in the Cause becomes imperative with the approach of the proclamation programme. As this becomes effective more and more attention will be directed to the claims of Bahá’u’lláh and opposition must be expected. “HOW GREAT, HOW VERY GREAT IS THE CAUSE;” wrote the Master, “HOW VERY FIERCE THE ONSLAUGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLES AND KINDREDS OF THE EARTH! ERE LONG SHALL THE CLAMOUR OF THE MULTITUDE THROUGHOUT AFRICA, THROUGHOUT AMERICA, THE CRY OF THE EUROPEAN AND OF THE TURK, THE GROANING OF INDIA AND CHINA BE HEARD FROM FAR AND NEAR. ONE AND ALL THEY SHALL ARISE WITH ALL THEIR POWER TO RESIST HIS CAUSE. THEN SHALL THE KNIGHTS OF THE LORD, ASSISTED BY HIS GRACE FROM ON HIGH, STRENGTHENED BY FAITH, AIDED BY THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING AND REINFORCED BY THE LEGIONS OF THE COVENANT, ARISE AND MAKE MANIFEST THE TRUTH OF THE VERSE: ‘BEHOLD THE CONFUSION THAT HATH BEFALLEN THE TRIBES OF THE DEFEATED!’”

Mindful of the countless expressions of Divine love found in our Scriptures and aware of the extraordinary nature of the crisis facing humanity, we call the friends to a new realization of the very great things which are expected from us in this Day. We recall that the Blessed Beauty, Bahá’u’lláh, as well as His “Best-Beloved” before Him and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after Him bore Their sufferings in this world in order that mankind might be freed from material fetters and “attain unto true liberty”, “might prosper and flourish”, “attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness”, and we pray that the endeavours of

the friends may be the means by which this glory and felicity will speedily come to pass.

The Universal House of Justice

May 1968

The Universal House of Justice

9 May 1968

To all National Bahá'í Conventions

WITH JOYFUL MEMORY OF DEDICATED SPIRIT MATURE DELIBERATIONS
SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION HAIL GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
NATIONAL CONVENTIONS AS CRUCIAL MIDWAY POINT NINE YEAR PLAN
APPROACHES GALVANIZE BELIEVERS DIRECT ALL EFFORTS
ACHIEVEMENT EVERY REMAINING GOAL AND SIMULTANEOUSLY
EXTEND ACCELERATE UNIVERSAL PROCLAMATION DIVINE MESSAGE.
WITH UTMOST LOVE CALL UPON ALL BAHÁ'ÍS FOR SACRIFICIAL
OUTPOURING ENERGIES RESOURCES ADVANCEMENT REDEEMING ORDER
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH SOLE REFUGE MISDIRECTED HEEDLESS MILLIONS. WORLD
CENTRE FAITH SCENE PROLONGED PRAYERFUL CONSULTATION WITH
ASSEMBLED HANDS CAUSE GOALS PLAN INCLUDING FUNDAMENTAL
OBJECTIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTION HANDS VIEW EXTENSION
FUTURE GOD-GIVEN DUTIES PROTECTION PROPAGATION. SUPPLICATING
CONTINUALLY HOLY SHRINES LORD HOSTS BOUNTIFULLY REWARD
DEDICATED ARDENT LOVERS COMPLETE GLORIOUS VICTORY.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1969

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 126

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The continued progress of the Cause of God stands in vivid contrast to the chronic unrest afflicting human society, a contrast which the events of the past year, both within and without the Faith, have only served to intensify. Amidst the disintegration of the old order the Cause of God has pursued its majestic course, extending the range of its activities and influence and accomplishing a further development of its administrative system.

Opening with the convening, in the Holy Land, of the Second International Convention for the election of the Universal House of Justice, the year has witnessed a remarkable activity in the Cause. The most significant and far-reaching development was undoubtedly the appointment of the eleven Continental Boards of Counsellors, which fulfilled the goal of the Nine Year Plan calling for the development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation. This step, taken after full consultation with the Hands of the Cause, has, at one and the same time, strongly reinforced the activities of that Institution and made it possible for the Hands themselves to extend the range of their individual services beyond the continental sphere, thereby making universally available to the friends the love, the wisdom and the spirit of dedication animating the Guardian's appointees. We wish to pay tribute at this

time to the exemplary manner in which the Counsellors, under the guidance of the Hands, have embarked upon their high duties.

In August, the first Oceanic Bahá'í Conference, held in Palermo, commemorated Bahá'u'lláh's voyage on the Mediterranean Sea on His way to the Most Great Prison. Attendants at this Conference came immediately afterwards to the Qiblih of their Faith to pay homage at the Shrine of its Founder and to commemorate with deep awareness of its spiritual import the long prophesied arrival of the Lord of Hosts on the shores of the Holy Land. This gathering of more than two thousand believers presented an inexpressibly poignant contrast to the actual arrival of Bahá'u'lláh one hundred years before, rejected by the rulers of this earth and derided by the local populace. Such is the conquering power of His Message, such is the undefeatable might of the King of Kings.

That same message is now being proclaimed by His followers from end to end of the world. Already one hundred and twenty-two Heads of State have been presented with the special edition of "*The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*", and copies have been received by thousands more officials and leaders.

Taking full advantage of the designation of 1968 as Human Rights Year by the United Nations, Bahá'í communities throughout the world have not only strengthened the ties between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations, but have at the same time proclaimed the Faith and its healing message. In country after country the Cause has been featured for the first time in modern mass communications media. The volume of this call to the peoples of the world is increasing day by day and must so continue, penetrating every stratum of society, until the conclusion of the Plan and beyond.

As a stimulus and aid to this vital work as well as to the promotion of all the goals of the Plan, we announce the holding between August 1970 and September 1971 of a series of eight Oceanic and Continental Conferences, as follows: La Paz, Bolivia, and Rose Hill,

Mauritius, in August 1970; Monrovia, Liberia, and Djakarta, Indonesia, in January 1971; Suva, Fiji, and Kingston, Jamaica, in May 1971; Sapporo, Japan, and Reykjavik, Iceland, in September 1971.

A review of the progress of the Nine Year Plan discloses that great strides have been made in the acquisition of Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites and Teaching Institutes, in translation of Bahá'í literature into more languages and in the incorporation of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. The site of the Panama Temple has been prepared for construction which will begin as soon as final plans and specifications and the placing of the contract have been approved.

As a result of the accelerated pace of expansion and consolidation which has been initiated, and which, if fostered and fed, will become a full tide of victorious achievement, we joyfully announce the formation of twelve more National Spiritual Assemblies, two during Ridván 1969: the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Burundi and Rwanda with its seat in Bujumbura and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Papua and New Guinea with its seat in Lae, and ten during Ridván 1970: six in Africa, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of the Congo Republic (Kinshasa); Ghana; Dahomey, Togo and Niger; Malawi; Botswana; and Gambia, Senegal, Portuguese Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands; one in the Americas, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Guianas; one in Asia, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of the Near East; and two in Australasia, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Tonga and the Cook Islands; and Samoa. Thus at Ridván 1970 the number of National Spiritual Assemblies will be raised to ninety-three.

In harmony with the world-wide growth of the Cause the World Centre of the Faith is also developing rapidly. The pilgrims, the beloved Guardian has said, are the life-blood of this World Centre and it has long been our cherished hope and desire to be able to grant the bounty of pilgrimage to the Holy Land to all who can avail themselves of it. It is therefore with great joy that we now find it possible to open the door of pilgrimage to a much greater number of

believers. Beginning in October of this year the size of each group of friends to be invited will be quadrupled and the number of groups each year will be increased so that nearly six times the present number of pilgrims will have the opportunity each year to pray in the Shrines of the Central Figures of their Faith, to visit the places hallowed by the footsteps, sufferings and triumphs of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to meditate in the tranquillity of these sacred precincts, beautified with so much loving care by our beloved Guardian.

This increased flow of pilgrims will greatly augment the spiritual development of the Bahá'í World Community which now, after five years of strenuous labour and bearing the laurels of outstanding victories, is entering the fourth phase of the Nine Year Plan.

The great, the most pressing need, at this stage of the Plan, is a rapid increase in the number of believers, and a major advance in the opening of the additional localities as well as in the formation of the well-grounded Local Spiritual Assemblies called for in the Plan. This world-wide activity, the hall-mark of the fourth phase of the Plan, answering the tremendous opportunities offered by the present condition of mankind, will be strongly reinforced by the continuance of proclamation, is the essential foundation for the erection of the remaining National Spiritual Assemblies, and will increasingly witness to the benefits of international travelling teaching and inter-Assembly cooperation. Above all, it requires a sacrificial outpouring by the friends of contributions in support of the Funds of the Faith, and the raising up of a mighty host of pioneers.

During the second year of the Plan the Bahá'í world achieved its greatest feat of organized pioneering when a total of five hundred and five believers arose to settle in the unopened and weakly held territories of the earth. This magnificent achievement must now be surpassed. The call is raised for seven hundred and thirty-three believers to leave their homes and settle in territories of the globe in dire need of pioneer support or as yet unopened to the Faith. These devoted believers, who should arise without delay, are needed to settle, during the fourth phase of the Plan, in 184 specified territories

of the globe: 48 in Africa, 40 in the Americas, 40 in Asia, 18 in Australasia and 38 in Europe. Although primary responsibility has been assigned to those national Bahá'í communities most able to provide pioneers, all should ponder in their hearts whether they too cannot respond to this call, either by going themselves or by deputizing, in response to Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, those who can go in their stead. Detailed information is being sent to National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that this vital mobilization of Bahá'í warriors is accomplished as quickly as possible.

Beloved Friends, the Nine Year Plan is well advanced, our work is blessed by the never-ceasing confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, and the entire Bahá'í World Community is committed to complete victory. That happy consummation, now faintly discernible on the far horizon, will be reached through hard work, realistic planning, sacrificial deeds, intensification of the teaching work and, above all, through constant endeavour on the part of every single Bahá'í to conform his inner life to that glorious ideal set for mankind by Bahá'u'lláh and exemplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In contemplating the Master's divine example we may well reflect that His life and deeds were not acted to a pattern of expediency, but were the inevitable and spontaneous expression of His inner self. We, likewise, shall act according to His example only as our inward spirits, growing and maturing through the disciplines of prayer and practice of the Teachings, become the wellsprings of all our attitudes and actions. This will promote the accomplishment of God's purpose; this will ensure the triumph of His Faith and enable us to build up the present motion of the Cause into a grand momentum whose force will carry the community of the Most Great Name to glorious victory in 1973 and onwards to the as yet unapprehended vistas of the Most Great Peace.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1970

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 1970

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMUNITY ENTERING SEVENTH YEAR NINE YEAR PLAN HAS AMPLY DEMONSTRATED ABILITY SCALE HEIGHTS DEVOTION SACRIFICE WIN ASTONISHING VICTORIES WORLD-REDEEMING WORLD-HEALING WORLD-UNITING FAITH. AT THIS RIDVÁN EXTEND LOVING WELCOME ELEVEN NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES NOW FORMING SEVEN IN AFRICA ONE IN AMERICAS ONE IN ASIA TWO IN AUSTRALASIA RAISING TO NINETY-FOUR NUMBER SUPPORTING PILLARS UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE. MOVED PAY LOVING TRIBUTE HANDS CAUSE GOD THEIR BRILLIANT SERVICES BLAZING TEACHING TRAILS SURFACE PLANET UPLIFTING ADVISING ASSEMBLIES FRIENDS ALL CONTINENTS. IN VIEW EFFECTIVE REINFORCEMENT THIS NOBLE WORK BY ABLE DEDICATED CONTINENTAL BOARDS COUNSELLORS THEIR AUXILIARY BOARDS TOGETHER WITH GROWING NEED AND EXPANSION WORLD COMMUNITY ANNOUNCE AUGMENTATION VITAL INSTITUTION THROUGH APPOINTMENT THREE ADDITIONAL COUNSELLORS IRAJ AYMAN WESTERN ASIA ANNELIESE BOPP BETTY REED EUROPE AND AUTHORIZATION APPOINTMENT FORTY-FIVE ADDITIONAL AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS NINE AFRICA SIXTEEN ASIA TWO AUSTRALASIA EIGHTEEN WESTERN HEMISPHERE. CALLING FORMATION FOUR NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES RIDVÁN 1971 LESOTHO SEAT MASERU IVORY COAST MALI AND UPPER VOLTA SEAT ABIDJAN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SEAT PORT OF SPAIN SOLOMON ISLANDS SEAT HONIARA. NINE YEAR PLAN ALREADY MARKED GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS PIONEERING PROCLAMATION RECOGNITION FAITH UPSURGE YOUTH ACQUISITION PROPERTIES COMMENCEMENT CONSTRUCTION PANAMA TEMPLE DEVELOPMENTS WORLD CENTRE. URGENT IMMEDIATE VITAL NEED CONCENTRATE ATTENTION INCREASE NUMBER LOCALITIES LOCAL

SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES BELIEVERS FILL REMAINING PIONEER POSTS. LAST RIDVÁN CALL RAISED SEVEN HUNDRED AND THIRTY-THREE PIONEERS MINIMUM REQUIREMENT. FOUR HUNDRED AND SEVENTYNINE SPECIFIC POSTS STILL UNFILLED. TOTAL VICTORY REQUIRES MORE PIONEERS MORE FUNDS MORE NEW BELIEVERS. HANDS CAUSE COUNSELLORS BOARD MEMBERS NATIONAL LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES EVERY SINGLE FOLLOWER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH SUMMONED UTMOST EFFORT REMAINING YEARS NINE YEAR PLAN. ACHIEVEMENT THIS STEP MASTER'S DIVINE PLAN WILL ENDOW COMMUNITY CAPACITY ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES UNDERTAKE NEXT STAGE IMPLEMENTATION SUPREME PURPOSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S REVELATION UNIFICATION MANKIND ESTABLISHMENT LONG PROMISED KINGDOM GOD THIS EARTH. ASSURE ARDENT LOVING PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES."

The Universal House of Justice

April 1971

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1971

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

On November 28th 1971 the Bahá'í World will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant, the Ensign of the Oneness of Mankind, the Mystery of God, an event which signalized at once the end of the Heroic Age of our Faith, the opening of the Formative Age and the birth of the Administrative Order, the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. As we contemplate the fruits of the Master's Ministry harvested during the first fifty years of the Formative Age, a period dominated by the dynamic and beloved figure of Shoghi Effendi, whose life was dedicated to the systematic implementation of the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of the Tablets of the Divine Plan—the two charters provided by the Master for the administration and the teaching of the Cause of God—we may well experience a sense of awe at the prospect of the next fifty years. That first half-century of the Formative Age has seen the Bahá'í Community grow from a few hundred centres in 35 countries in 1921, to over 46,000 centres in 135 independent states and 182 significant territories and islands at the present day, has been marked by the raising throughout the world of the framework of the Administrative Order, which in its turn has brought recognition of the Faith by many governments and civil authorities and accreditation in consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and has witnessed the spread to many parts of the world of that “entry by

troops” promised by the Master and so long and so eagerly anticipated by the friends.

A new horizon, bright with intimations of thrilling developments in the unfolding life of the Cause of God, is now discernible. The approach to it is complete victory in the Nine Year Plan. For we should never forget that the beloved Guardian’s Ten Year Crusade, the current Nine Year Plan, other plans to follow throughout successive epochs of the Formative Age of the Faith, are all phases in the implementation of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, set out in fourteen of His Tablets to North America.

The Nine Year Plan is well advanced, and this Ridván will witness the establishment of seven more National Spiritual Assemblies, five in Africa, one in South America and one in the Pacific, bringing the total number of these exalted bodies to 101. Next Ridván the nine already announced will be formed, together with 4 more, one each in Afghanistan, Arabia, the Windward Islands and Puerto Rico, bringing the total to 114, six more than called for in the Nine Year Plan. The members of all National Spiritual Assemblies which will be elected at Ridván 1972 will take part in the election of the Universal House of Justice at Ridván 1973, when an international convention will be held at the World Centre.

The Mother Temple of Latin America, the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of Panama, is scheduled to be completed by December 1971 and its dedication will take place at the following Ridván.

The wonderful spirit released at the four Oceanic and Intercontinental Conferences, together with the practical benefits which accrued to the Cause from them, reinforce our high hopes that the four Conferences to be held this year will be resounding successes and result in more pioneers, more travelling teachers, greater proclamation of the Message and a raising of the spirits and devotion of the friends.

Our appeal to the friends in December 1970 for support of the Bahá’í International Fund, which had reached a serious condition due to

various unforeseen circumstances, has had a magnificent response from many quarters of the world-wide Bahá'í Community, and we are heartened to believe that this manifestation of devotion and sacrifice, as it continues and becomes more widespread, will resolve the condition that had threatened to adversely affect the attainment of cherished goals of the Nine Year Plan.

The travels and other services of the Hands of the Cause of God continually evoke our thankfulness and delight, even wonder and astonishment. Their deeds are such as to eclipse the acts of the apostles of old and to confer eternal splendour on this period of the Formative Age. On behalf of all the friends everywhere, we offer them our reverent love and gratitude. It is fitting to record here the passing, after seventy years' exemplary service to the Faith, of the Hand of the Cause Agnes Alexander, whose early services in Hawaii were said by the Master to be greater than if she had founded an empire.

Restrictive measures, directed against the Faith, and varying in severity from outright oppression to imposition of disabilities make virtually impossible the achievement of the goals of the Nine Year Plan in a number of countries, particularly in the Middle East, in North West Africa, along the fringes of East Africa and certain areas in South East Asia. It is hoped that those Bahá'í communities which enjoy freedom to teach their Faith will so far surpass their own goals as to amply compensate for the disabilities suffered by their less fortunate brothers. The army of travelling teachers must be reinforced and the friends, particularly Bahá'í youth, are called to seriously consider how much time they can offer to the Faith during the remaining two years of the Nine Year Plan. Teaching visits of brief or long duration, deputization of others, the undertaking of such tasks as would free other friends for teaching work, are all means of building up, in unison, that final surge which will carry the Plan to victory.

Two major objectives of the Plan are the formation of new Local Spiritual Assemblies and the opening of new localities. 14,966 Local Spiritual Assemblies are called for; 10,360 are now in existence; 54,503 localities must claim a Bahá'í resident; 46,334 do so now. The

goal is in sight, the time short. However, the growth reflected in the above statistics has not taken place at all levels and in all areas. For while a number of national communities have already achieved, or even surpassed the goals assigned to them, many face extreme difficulties in attaining theirs. With mutual help and an increase in the momentum already generated there is no doubt that the community of the Most Great Name is capable of sweeping on to total victory, thereby gaining a view of those enthralling vistas at present beyond the horizon.

The twin processes so clearly described by the beloved Guardian in his essay “The Unfoldment of World Civilization”—the steady progress and consolidation of the Cause of God on the one hand and the progressive disintegration of a moribund world on the other—will undoubtedly impose upon us new tasks, the obligation of devising new approaches to teaching, of demonstrating more clearly to a disillusioned world the Bahá’í way of life and making more effective the administrative institutions of the Faith. The authority and influence of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be strengthened in order to deal with larger Bahá’í communities; the international character of the Cause will need to be developed, while the international teaching agency at the World Centre, already referred to in previous general letters, will be established.

However fascinating such considerations, which are likely to be forced upon our attention in the near future, may be, they must not deflect our energies and will from the immediate task—the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Their achievement is the best preparation for the future and the means of developing new powers and capacities in the Bahá’í Community. We are confident that the Army of Light, growing in strength and unity will, by 1973, the centenary year of the revelation of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, have scaled the heights of yet another peak in the path leading ultimately to the broad uplands of the Most Great Peace.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1972

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1972

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The opening of the final year of the Nine Year Plan sees the Bahá'í world community poised for overwhelming victory. With grateful hearts we acknowledge the continuing confirmations which have attended its efforts and the Divine bounties which have never ceased to rain down upon this blessed, this ever-developing embryonic world order.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Panama, the Mother Temple of Latin America, will be dedicated this Riḍván. Three beloved Hands of the Cause, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm representing the Universal House of Justice, Ugo Giachery and Dhikru'lláh Khadem will attend this historic ceremony. The imaginative and inspiring concept of the architect, Peter Tillotson, has been wonderfully realized and we extend to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama on behalf of the entire Bahá'í world, loving congratulations on their achievement.

Although the dissolution of the National Spiritual Assembly of 'Iraq has, unhappily, resulted from the persecution of the Faith in that land, the thirteen new National Spiritual Assemblies which will come into being this Riḍván will bring the total number of these pillars of the Universal House of Justice to 113.

The goals requiring acquisition of properties and establishment of Teaching Institutes are well in hand and, in those countries where legal circumstances permit, incorporation of Assemblies and recognition of Bahá'í marriage and Holy Days are making good progress.

It is the teaching goals which must engage our attention and effort. Although more than 260 territories have achieved their assigned goals of localities where Bahá'ís reside, and in some cases have exceeded them, enabling the Bahá'í world community to rejoice in having outstripped on a world scale the total number of localities envisaged in the Plan, there are still some 60 territories where this goal is yet to be won and where its attainment must be given absolute priority between now and Ridván 1973. It is expected that a large number of new Local Spiritual Assemblies will be established at Ridván and immediately the position of this goal is ascertained a detailed listing of all territories throughout the world which have not yet won their goals for localities and Local Spiritual Assemblies will be sent to every National Spiritual Assembly for urgent release to the friends.

It is hoped that during this last year of the Plan the principle of collaboration between National Spiritual Assemblies will be extended far beyond the special tasks set in the Nine Year Plan. Those communities which have already attained their goals or are in clear sight of them should consider the world picture as disclosed by the listing mentioned above and do everything they can, without jeopardizing their own success, to assist their fellow communities with pioneers and travelling teachers, or in any other way possible. Such a process will greatly consolidate the unity and brotherhood of the Bahá'í world community.

In the meantime we call on all believers everywhere to prayerfully consider their personal circumstances, and to arise while there is yet time, to fill the international pioneer goals of the Plan. There are 267 pioneer needs still to be answered—75 in Africa, 57 in the Americas, 40 in Asia, 30 in Australasia and 65 in Europe.

The extraordinary advances made since that Ridván of 1964 when the Nine Year Plan was begun, continuing the organized and purposeful process of teaching on a world scale instituted by our beloved Guardian when he launched the Ten Year Crusade, force upon our attention new requirements of this ever-growing world order both for its own organic life and in relation to the disintegrating world society in which it is set. The divergence between the ways of the world and of the Cause of God becomes ever wider. And yet the two must come together. The Bahá'í community must demonstrate in ever-increasing measure its ability to redeem the disorderliness, the lack of cohesion, the permissiveness, the godlessness of modern society; the laws, the religious obligations, the observances of Bahá'í life, Bahá'í moral principles and standards of dignity, decency and reverence, must become deeply implanted in Bahá'í consciousness and increasingly inform and characterize this community. Such a process will require a great development in the maturity and effectiveness of Local Spiritual Assemblies. The purposes and standards of the Cause must be more and more understood and courageously upheld. The influence of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and the work of their Auxiliary Boards must develop and spread through the entire fabric of the Bahá'í community. A vast systematic programme for the production of Bahá'í literature must be promoted.

Our immediate and inescapable task, however, is to ensure that every attainable goal of the Nine Year Plan is achieved. This must be done at all costs. No sacrifice, no deferment of cherished plans must be refused in order to discharge this “most important” of the many “important” duties facing us. Who can doubt that one last supreme effort will be crowned with success? Even now the national community to bear the laurels of first achieving every task assigned to it, Fiji, leads the procession of rejoicing and victorious communities within the Army of Light. We may well emulate Bahá'í youth whose recent surge forward into the van of proclamation and teaching is one of the most encouraging and significant trends in the Faith, and who storm the gates of heaven for support in their enterprises by long-sustained, precedent and continuing prayer. We are all able to call upon Bahá'u'lláh for His Divine, all-powerful aid, and He will surely help us. For He is the Hearer of prayers, the Answerer.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1973

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 1973

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

We announce with joyful and thankful hearts the completion in overwhelming victory of the world-encircling Nine Year Plan. The Army of Light has won its second global campaign; it has surpassed the goals set for expansion and has achieved a truly impressive degree of universal participation, the twin objectives of the Plan. With gratitude and love we testify to the unceasing confirmations which Bahá'u'lláh has showered upon His servants, enabling each and every one of us to offer Him some part of the labour, the devotion, the sacrifice, the supplication which He has so bountifully rewarded. At this Centenary of the Revelation of the Most Holy Book, the Community of the Most Great Name lays its tribute of victory at His feet, acknowledging that it is He Who has bestowed it.

The Cause of God at the end of the Nine Year Plan is immensely more widespread, more firmly founded, and its own international relations more closely knit than in 1964 when the Plan was launched. Ninety-five new territories have been opened to the Faith; the 69 National Spiritual Assemblies which shouldered the world community's task have become 113, 5 more than called for. These embryonic secondary Houses of Justice are supported by more than 17,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies, 3,000 in excess of the goal and 12,000 more than at the beginning of the Plan. Bahá'ís reside in 69,500 localities, 15,000 more than called for, and 54,000 more than

in 1964. Bahá'í literature has been translated into 225 more languages bringing the total number to 571; 63 Temple sites, 56 National Hazíratu'l-Quds, and 62 National Endowments have been acquired bringing the total numbers of these properties to 98, 112 and 104 respectively; 50 Teaching Institutes and Summer and Winter Schools are playing their part in Bahá'í education and 15 Publishing Trusts produce Bahá'í literature in major languages of the world. The Mother Temple of Latin America has been built and dedicated. Among those goals whose achievement is dependent on favourable circumstances outside our control are the incorporation of Assemblies and recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days. It is gratifying to record that 90 National Spiritual Assemblies and 1,556 Local Spiritual Assemblies—181 more than the total number called for—are incorporated, while Bahá'í Holy Days are recognized in 64 countries and Bahá'í certification of marriage in 40.

This great expansion of the Faith required an army of international pioneers. Two major calls were raised, for 461 and 733, which together with others for particular posts made an overall total of 1,344. The Community of the Most Great Name responded with 3,553 who actually left their homes, 2,265 of whom are still at their posts.

At the World Centre of the Faith the collation and classification of the Bahá'í Sacred Scriptures and of the writings of Shoghi Effendi have been carried forward in ever increasing volume, a task supported and enriched by the labours of a special committee appointed by the Persian National Spiritual Assembly.

The material at the World Centre, includes some 2,600 original Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh, 6,000 by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and 2,300 letters of Shoghi Effendi. There are in addition some 18,000 authenticated copies of other such Tablets and letters. All these have been studied, important passages from them excerpted and classified, and the subject matter indexed under 400 general headings.

A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”—completing the considerable progress made by the beloved Guardian in this task—is being published on the Centenary of the Revelation of the Most Holy Book, which, as already announced, is to be celebrated both in the Holy Land and throughout the Bahá’í world during this Ridván.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, hailed by Shoghi Effendi as the Most Great Law of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, has been formulated and published.

The gardens in Bahjí and on Mount Carmel have been significantly extended and plans have been approved for the befitting development and beautification of the entire area of Bahá’í property surrounding the Holy Shrines in Bahjí and Haifa.

The world-wide proclamation of the Faith, an intensive and long-to-be-sustained process initiated during the third phase of the Plan, opened in October 1967 with the commemoration of the Centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Proclamation to the kings and rulers which had centred around His revelation of the Súriy-i-Mulúk in Adrianople. This historic event was commemorated at six Intercontinental Conferences held simultaneously around the planet. A further nine Oceanic and Continental Conferences held during the Plan gave great impetus to this proclamation programme. The fifteen Conferences were attended by nearly 17,000 believers and attracted great publicity by press and radio and were made the occasion of acquainting dignitaries and notabilities with the Divine Message. The presentation, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, to 142 Heads of State, of a specially produced book containing the translation into English of the Tablets and passages of Scripture in which Bahá’u’lláh, some hundred years before, had issued His mighty Proclamation to mankind, initiated this campaign, which will continue long beyond the end of the Nine Year Plan.

The outstanding development in the relationship of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations was the accreditation

of that Community as a non-governmental organization with consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. The Bahá'í International Community now has a permanent representative at United Nations and maintains an office in New York.

The loved and revered Hands of the Cause have rendered sacrificial and distinguished service throughout the Nine Year Plan. They have, in all parts of the world, inspired the friends, assisted National Spiritual Assemblies, promoted the teaching work and played a vital part in the success of the Plan. The lagging fortunes of more than one national community have been revolutionized by a visit of a Hand of the Cause; swift and energetic action, inspired by the Hand, has been followed by astonishing results, completely reversing that community's prospects. They have added distinguished works to the literature of the Faith.

The goal of the Plan to develop "The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, in consultation with the body of the Hands of the Cause, with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation", was accomplished in stages, leading to the establishment of eleven Continental Boards of Counsellors, whose members were appointed by the Universal House of Justice and who assumed responsibility for the Auxiliary Boards for protection and propagation. The beloved Hands no longer remained individually identified with any particular continent—except insofar as their residence was concerned—but extended their sphere of action to the whole planet. The Continental Boards of Counsellors, advised and guided by the Hands of the Cause of God and working in close collaboration with them, have already, in their brief period of office, performed outstanding and distinguished services.

Three highly portentous developments have taken place during the Nine Year Plan, namely, the advance of youth to the forefront of the teaching work, a great increase in the financial resources of the Faith, and an astonishing proliferation of inter-National Assembly assistance projects.

The first, the heartwarming upsurge of Bahá'í youth, has changed the face of the teaching work; impenetrable barriers have been broken or overpassed by eager teams of young Bahá'ís, dedicated and prayerful, presenting the Divine Message in ways acceptable to their own generation from which it has spread and is spreading throughout the social structure. The entire Bahá'í world has been thrilled by this development. Having rejected the values and standards of the old world, Bahá'í youth are eager to learn and adapt themselves to the standards of Bahá'u'lláh and so to offer the Divine Programme to fill the gap left by the abandonment of the old order.

The vast increase in the financial resources of the Faith called for under the Plan has evoked a heartwarming response from the entire Bahá'í community. Not only the Bahá'í International Fund but the local, national and continental Funds of the Faith have been sacrificially supported. This practical proof of the love which the friends bear for the Faith has enabled all the work to go forward—the support of pioneers and travelling teachers, the raising of Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs and acquisition of Bahá'í properties, the purchase of Holy Places in the Cradle of the Faith and at the World Centre, the development of educational institutions and all the multifarious activities of a vigorous, onward-marching, constructive world community. It is of interest that sixty percent of the international funds of the Faith is used to assist the work of National Spiritual Assemblies, to promote the teaching work and to defend the Cause against attacks in many parts of the world. Without such help from the Bahá'í world community many National Assemblies would be paralyzed in their efforts of expansion and deepening. The administration of Huququ'lláh has been strengthened in preparation for its extension to other parts of the world. An International Deputization Fund was established at the World Centre to assist pioneers and travelling teachers who were ready to serve but unable to provide their own expenses, and this Fund was later extended to the support of projects on national homefronts. Contribution to the Fund is a service which will never cease to be open to all believers; the growth of the Faith and the rise of its Administrative Order require an ever-increasing outpouring of our substance, commensurate in however small a measure with the bounty and liberality of the outpouring confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh.

When the Plan was launched 219 assistance projects were specified whereby national communities would render financial, pioneering or teaching aid to others, generally remote from them geographically. The intention was to strengthen the bonds of unity between distant parts of the Bahá'í world with different social, cultural and historical backgrounds. At the end of the Plan more than 600 such projects had been carried out. Intercommunity cooperation has been further developed in the field of publishing Bahá'í literature, notably in Spanish and French and the languages of Africa. A vast field of fruitful endeavour lies open in this respect.

In some countries due to lack of freedom, to actual repression in others, to legal and physical obstacles in yet others, certain particular goals mainly—those requiring incorporation or recognition—could not be won. Foreseeing this, the Universal House of Justice called upon national communities in lands where there is freedom to practise and promote the Faith, to exceed their own goals and thus ensure that the overall goals would be won. It has proved still impossible to begin work on the erection of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Tihrán, but contracts have been signed for the preparation of detailed drawings, geological surveys are being made, and everything made ready for immediate action whenever the situation in Persia becomes propitious.

During the period of the Nine Year Plan a number of important and interesting events, not directly associated with it, have taken place. First and foremost was the commemoration, in the precincts of the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world, of the centenary of the arrival at the prison-city of 'Akká, as foretold in former Scriptures, of the Promised One of all ages.

The Mansion of Mazra'ih, often referred to by the beloved Guardian as one of the “twin mansions” in which the Blessed Beauty resided after nine years within the walled prison-city of 'Akká, and dear to the hearts of the believers by reason of its associations with their Lord, has at last been purchased together with 24,000 square metres of land extending into the plain on its eastward side.

The raising of the obelisk, marking the site of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár on Mount Carmel, completes a project initiated by the beloved Guardian.

The decision has been made and announced to the Bahá'í world, and the initial steps have been taken for the erection on Mount Carmel, at a site on the Arc as purposed by Shoghi Effendi, of the building which shall serve as the Seat of the Universal House of Justice.

The progress of the Cause of God gathers increasing momentum and we may with confidence look forward to the day when this Community, in God's good time, shall have traversed the stages predicated for it by its Guardian, and shall have raised on this tormented planet the fair mansions of God's Own Kingdom wherein humanity may find surcease from its self-induced confusion and chaos and ruin, and the hatreds and violence of this time shall be transmuted into an abiding sense of world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1974

The Universal House of Justice

Naw-Rúz 1974

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

A span of eighteen years separates us from the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension and the unveiling of His Almighty Covenant. The fortunes of humanity in that period no man can foretell. We can, however, confidently predict that the Cause of God, impelled by the mighty forces of life within it, must go on from strength to strength, increasing in size and developing greater and greater powers for the accomplishment of God's purpose on earth.

The abundant evidences of Divine confirmation which have rewarded the strenuous and dedicated efforts of the Bahá'í community during the past decade are apparent throughout the earth and give incontrovertible assurance of its capacity to win the good pleasure of Bahá'u'lláh and answer every call made upon it in His service.

The Five Year Plan to which this community is now summoned is the opening campaign of these critical years. It is the third global plan embarked upon by the Army of Light in its implementation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, that world-encompassing programme disclosed in His perspicuous Tablets and described by the Guardian of the Cause of God as the Charter for the propagation of the Faith throughout the world. It was the Guardian himself, the beloved "sign of God", who, through his exposition and interpretation of the Revelation, through his discipline and education of the Bahá'í

community and through a series of national plans assigned to the various units of that community, forged the Administrative Order of the Faith and made it an instrument for the carrying out of this great Charter, and he himself designed and launched the first global plan, the unique, brilliant and spiritually glorious Ten Year Crusade. The victories of that crusade implanted the banner of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the planet and the following Nine Year Plan reinforced and extended the bastions of the Faith and raised the number of National Spiritual Assemblies the—supporting pillars of the Universal House of Justice—to one hundred and thirteen, a number increased to one hundred and fifteen by the formation at this Ridván of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Hong Kong and South East Arabia.

This Five Year Plan has three major objectives: preservation and consolidation of the victories won; a vast and widespread expansion of the Bahá'í community; development of the distinctive character of Bahá'í life particularly in the local communities. The achievement of these overall aims requires the accomplishment of particular tasks at the World Centre of the Faith, and by national and local communities.

At the World Centre work will continue on the collation and classification of the Sacred Texts; authorized translations of three compilations of Scripture will be made and published, namely, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, prayers and extracts from the Writings of the Báb, greatly augmenting the fragments of His Utterance now available in the West, and of the Master's works comprising a wide selection from the vast range of subjects illumined by His Divine wisdom; construction will begin on the building on Mount Carmel to serve as the seat of the Universal House of Justice and it is hoped to complete it during the Five Year Plan; further extension and beautification of the gardens and lands surrounding the Holy Places will take place; strengthening of the relationship between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations will continue; and efforts will be constantly made to protect the Faith from persecution and to free it from the restraints imposed by religious orthodoxy.

In the international sphere the erection of two Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs one—in India and one in Samoa—will be initiated; eight International Teaching Conferences will be held during the middle part of the Five Year Plan; two for the Arctic, one in Anchorage and one in Helsinki during July 1976, one in Paris in August 1976, one in Nairobi in October 1976, one in Hong Kong in November 1976, one in Auckland and one in Bahia, Brazil in January 1977 and one in Mérida, Mexico in February 1977.

Sixteen new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed, namely the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahamas, Burundi, Cyprus, the French Antilles, Greece, Jordan, Mali, Mauritania, the New Hebrides, Niger, Sénégal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Surinam and French Guiana, Togo, and Upper Volta; their national Hazíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites and endowments must be acquired; the dissemination of news and messages, so vital to the knowledge, encouragement and unity of the Bahá'í community, must be made efficient and rapid, and in anticipation of a vast expansion in the number of believers, of Local Spiritual Assemblies and of localities where Bahá'ís reside a coordinated programme of translating and publishing Bahá'í literature with the eventual aim of providing the Sacred Text and the teachings of the Faith to all mankind is to be developed—a programme which will include the founding of six Bahá'í Publishing Trusts and the continued subvention of Bahá'í literature, 409 inter-Assembly assistance projects are scheduled and, at the outset of the Plan, 557 pioneers are called for.

One of the distinguishing features of the Cause of God is its principle of non-acceptance of financial contributions for its own purposes from non-Bahá'ís; support of the Bahá'í Fund is a bounty reserved by Bahá'u'lláh to His declared followers. This bounty imposes full responsibility for financial support of the Faith on the believers alone, every one of whom is called upon to do his utmost to ensure that the constant and liberal outpouring of means is maintained and increased to meet the growing needs of the Cause. Many Bahá'í communities are at present dependent on outside help, and for them the aim must be to become self-supporting, confident that the Generous Lord will, as their efforts increase, eventually enable them to offer for the

progress of His Faith material wealth as well as their devotion, their energy and love.

The proclamation of the Faith, following established plans and aiming to use on an increasing scale the facilities of mass communication must be vigorously pursued. It should be remembered that the purpose of proclamation is to make known to all mankind the fact and general aim of the new Revelation, while teaching programmes should be planned to confirm individuals from every stratum of society.

The vast reservoir of spiritual energy, zeal and idealism resident in Bahá'í youth, which so effectively contributed to the success of the Nine Year Plan, must be directed and lavishly spent for the proclamation, teaching, and consolidation of the Cause. Spiritual Assemblies are urged to provide consultation and the offer of guidance to Bahá'í youth who seek to plan their lives in such a way as to be of utmost service to the Cause of God.

The education of children in the teachings of the Faith must be regarded as an essential obligation of every Bahá'í parent, every local and national community and it must become a firmly established Bahá'í activity during the course of the Plan. It should include moral instruction by word and example and active participation by children in Bahá'í community life.

This Five Year Plan must witness the development in the world-wide Bahá'í community of distinctive Bahá'í characteristics implanted in it by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Bahá'í communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Bahá'í community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships. The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Bahá'í communities. The practice and development of such Bahá'í

characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá'ís and administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock.

Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective of the Five Year Plan. Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Bahá'í life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Bahá'í community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order.

“These Spiritual Assemblies”, wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this?” Likewise, “These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are spread abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.”

During the Five Year Plan Local Spiritual Assemblies which are being formed for the first time are to be formed whenever there are nine or more adult believers in the relevant area; thereafter they must be elected or declared at Ridván. National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to assign, and encourage the Local Spiritual Assemblies

to adopt, goals within the overall framework of the Five Year Plan, to consult with them and to assist them to make great efforts to gradually assume their proper function and responsibilities in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends are called upon to give their whole-hearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programmes, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honour. This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for.

Such a firmly founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine Message to their fellow-men and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.

The deeds and programmes, all these multifarious world-wide activities to which you are summoned have but one aim—the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. At every stage of this process and at all levels of Bahá'í responsibility, whether individual, local or national, you will be encouraged, advised and assisted by the divinely ordained institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, an institution powerfully reinforced by the successful establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Through the emergence of this Centre the seal has been set on the accomplishment of the goal, announced nearly ten years ago, of ensuring the extension into the future of the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause in the Sacred Text. Through the work of the International Teaching Centre, which supervises and coordinates the work of the Boards of Counsellors around the world, the love, the guidance, the assistance of the Hands, through the Boards of Counsellors, their Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, permeates the entire structure of Bahá'í society.

The Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic world commonwealth have indeed assured to that growing community, the care for its welfare, for the development of its character, for its spiritual encouragement which are among the duties of their high office.

As the old order gives way to the new, the changes which must take place in human affairs are such as to stagger the imagination. This is the opportunity for the hosts of the Lord. Undismayed and undeterred by the wreckage of "long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions", now being "swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines", the world community of Bahá'ís must surge forward eagerly, and with ever-increasing energy, to build those new, God-given institutions from which will be diffused the light of the holy principles and teachings sent down by God in this day for the salvation of all mankind.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1975

The Universal House of Justice

4 April 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The following Riḍván message is expressed in cable form as it has been sent by cable to various areas distant from the Holy Land to ensure its arrival in time for National Conventions.

“OCCASION MOST GREAT FESTIVAL WE CONTEMPLATE WITH THANKFUL HEARTS ACHIEVEMENTS FIRST YEAR FIVE YEAR PLAN ELECTION THIS RIḌVÁN FIVE NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES FOUR IN AFRICA ONE IN ASIA. DESPITE WORSENING PLIGHT MORIBUND CIVILIZATION EVIDENCES GATHERING CLOUDS WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION DIVINE MESSAGE BELIEVERS THROUGHOUT WORLD FORGING AHEAD ACCOMPLISHMENT GOALS. THREE HUNDRED EIGHTY-SIX PIONEERS ALREADY SETTLED ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-TWO PREPARING PROCEED POSTS. NEW WORLDWIDE TRAVEL TEACHING PROGRAM DESIGNED BY INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE NOW BEING LAUNCHED BY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES IN CONSULTATION COUNSELLORS. BELOVED HANDS CAUSE ADVANCING VANGUARD ARMY LIGHT LENDING CONSTANT LOVING GUIDANCE ENCOURAGEMENT PROTECTION FRIENDS LABOURING DIVINE VINEYARD. WORLD CENTRE FAITH RICHLY BLESSED THROUGH ACQUISITION HOLY HOUSE MASTER BIRTHPLACE SHOGHI EFFENDI WITHIN WALLS ‘AKKÁ WILL EARLY WITNESS ON CONSECRATED SOIL SLOPES MOUNT CARMEL INITIATION EXCAVATION FOUNDATIONS PERMANENT SEAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE AND IN ITALY SIGNATURE CONTRACT MARBLE REQUIRED MAJESTIC EDIFICE. AT THIS CRITICAL

JUNCTURE HUMAN HISTORY THREE MAJOR OBJECTIVES PLAN AND ITS SPECIFIC GOALS PRESENT DISTINCT INSISTENT CHALLENGE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL BAHÁ'Í ADULT YOUTH CHILD TO EACH BAHÁ'Í FAMILY TO EACH LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ABOVE ALL TO EACH LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY WHOSE DEVELOPMENT IS VITAL SUCCESS FIVE YEAR PLAN AND PROGRESSIVE UNFOLDMENT DIVINELY ORDAINED BAHÁ'Í SOCIETY. MAY REMAINING THREE HUNDRED NINETY-FIVE PIONEERS SPEEDILY ARISE AND ARMY VOLUNTEERS RESPOND NEWLY LAUNCHED TRAVEL TEACHING PROGRAM. NATIONAL LOCAL ASSEMBLIES INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS URGED CONTRIBUTE UNSTINTINGLY TIME EFFORT OUTPOURING MATERIAL RESOURCES SUPPORT EVERY PHASE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN COMING YEAR. APPEAL BELIEVERS EVERY LAND JOIN US PRAYERS SUPPLICATION BLESSED BEAUTY GUIDE SUSTAIN PROTECT HIS DEVOTED FOLLOWERS IN THEIR DEDICATED EFFORTS PURIFY THEIR SOULS RAISE HIS BANNER SERVE HIS CAUSE. (SIGNED) UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE”.

Please ensure that this message is presented to your National Convention and made available to the friends under your jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For Department of the Secretariat

March 1976

The Universal House of Justice

Naw-Rúz 1976

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

ANNOUNCE DELEGATES ASSEMBLED NATIONAL CONVENTIONS GLAD TIDINGS COMPLETION EXCAVATION MOUNT CARMEL PREPARATORY RAISING MAJESTIC CENTRE LEGISLATION GOD'S FAITH THAT SACRED SPOT, SIGNATURE ITALY FIVE AND HALF MILLION DOLLAR CONTRACT FOR SUPPLYING OVER TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED CUBIC METRES PENTELIKON MARBLE FROM GREECE AND FASHIONING THEREFROM THE COLUMNS FACINGS ORNAMENTATION BEFITTING MONUMENTAL BUILDING. DEEPLY MOVED ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE BELIEVERS ALL PARTS WORLD THIS CHALLENGING GLORIOUS TASK. DEVELOPMENTS WORLD CENTRE PARALLELED FURTHER UNFOLDMENT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE CONTINENTAL NATIONAL LEVELS THROUGH RAISING NUMBER CONTINENTAL COUNSELLORS TO SIXTY-ONE BY APPOINTMENT THELMA KHELGHATI WESTERN AFRICA, WILLIAM MASEHLA SOUTHERN AFRICA, BURHANI'D-DIN AFSHIN SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA, HIDEYA SUZUKI NORTH-EASTERN ASIA, OWEN BATTRICK AUSTRALASIA AND ADIB TAHERZADEH EUROPE, AUTHORIZATION BOARDS COUNSELLORS APPOINT NINETY MORE MEMBERS AUXILIARY BOARDS, AND CALL FOR ELECTION AT RIDVÁN 1977 OF SEVEN NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES: TWO IN AFRICA, MALI WITH ITS SEAT IN BAMAKO AND UPPER VOLTA WITH ITS SEAT IN OUAGADOUGOU, TWO IN THE AMERICAS, THE FRENCH ANTILLES WITH ITS SEAT IN POINT-A-PITRE AND SURINAM AND FRENCH GUIANA WITH ITS SEAT IN PARAMARIBO, ONE IN EUROPE, GREECE WITH ITS SEAT IN ATHENS, AND TWO IN THE PACIFIC, THE NEW HEBRIDES WITH ITS SEAT IN PORT VILA AND THE MARSHALL ISLANDS WITH ITS SEAT IN MAJURO, THE LATTER BEING SUPPLEMENTARY ACHIEVEMENT OF PLAN. NUMBER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES THUS RAISED ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FOUR

FOLLOWING DISSOLUTION ACCOUNT LOCAL RESTRICTIONS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EQUATORIAL GUINEA NEPAL. OF NINE HUNDRED FIFTY-THREE PIONEERS CALLED FOR SPECIFIC POSTS FOUR HUNDRED NINETY-TWO ALREADY SETTLED. ALSO FOUR HUNDRED SEVENTY-SEVEN OTHER PIONEERS PROCEEDED GOAL COUNTRIES. GREAT OUTFLOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLING TEACHERS RECORDED. MOVED PAY TRIBUTE INDEFATIGABLE SERVICES HANDS CAUSE GOD PAST YEAR IN PROMOTING ABOVE SUCCESSES AND IN FIELDS TEACHING PROTECTION PRESERVATION PROCLAMATION AND LITERATURE FAITH AS WELL AS SIGNAL SERVICES INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE CONSTITUTING GREAT ACCESSION STRENGTH WORLD CENTRE RELIEF BURDENS RESTING UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE. MIDDLE YEAR FIVE YEAR PLAN NOW OPENING WILL WITNESS GATHERING FOLLOWERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH EIGHT INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CONFERENCES DESIGNED GENERATE TREMENDOUS IMPETUS PROGRESS PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENT WHOSE GOALS NOW LAGGING SERIOUSLY BEHIND. MOST PRESSING NEED FAITH THIS CRITICAL JUNCTURE ITS MISSION REDEEM MANKIND IS FOR EVERY BELIEVER ALL ASSEMBLIES NATIONAL LOCAL CONCENTRATE ATTAINMENT GOALS PLACED BEFORE BAHÁ'Í WORLD, PROMOTE PROCESS ENTRY BY TROOPS, ACHIEVE VAST INCREASE SIZE COMMUNITY, INCREASE NUMBER STEADFAST SELF-SACRIFICING BELIEVERS DEDICATED CONFORM EVERY ASPECT THEIR LIVES HIGH STANDARDS SET SACRED TEXTS. THE FIELD IS VAST THE TIME SHORT THE LABOURERS LAMENTABLY FEW BUT ON THE EFFORTS WE FOLLOWERS OF THE BLESSED BEAUTY NOW EXERT, ON THE DEGREE TO WHICH WE SUCCESSFULLY AND SPEEDILY PROCLAIM AND TEACH HIS MESSAGE TO OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, DEPENDS IN GREAT MEASURE THE COURSE OF HUMAN HISTORY IN THE DECADES IMMEDIATELY AHEAD.

The Universal House of Justice

March 1977

The Universal House of Justice

24 March 1977

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The following message has been telexed to Wilmette for publication in “Bahá'í News”.

“REJOICE OUTSTANDING EVENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS MARKING MID YEAR FIVE YEAR PLAN: PUBLICATION IN ENGLISH SELECTION WRITINGS BLESSED BÁB OPENING TO EYES WESTERN FOLLOWERS FAITH A PRICELESS TREASURY HIS IMMORTAL UTTERANCES, A BOUNTY WHICH CANNOT FAIL DRAW HEARTS EVER NEARER YOUTHFUL MARTYR-PROPHET; SUCCESSFUL HOLDING EIGHT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, BLAZONING NAME CAUSE GOD BEFORE A RECEPTIVE PUBLIC, KNITTING MORE CLOSELY TIES LINKING FRIENDS ALL LANDS, RESULTING UPSURGE INTENSE ACTIVITY TEACHING PIONEERING, CONFERRING AWARENESS URGENT CHALLENGE PRESENTED BY GOALS PLAN THIS CRITICAL PERIOD; PROFOUNDLY SIGNIFICANT VISIT TO RESTING PLACE BELOVED GUARDIAN BY FIRST REIGNING MONARCH TO ACCEPT FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH; DEPARTURE FORMER TENANTS HOUSE 'ABDU'LLAH-PÁSHÁ ENABLING FAITH OBTAIN POSSESSION RECENTLY PURCHASED HOLY PLACE INITIATE PROCESS RESTORATION PREPARATION EVENTUAL OPENING TO VISITS BY PILGRIMS; ARRIVAL HAIFA FIRST FOUR CONSIGNMENTS MARBLE AND INITIATION ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION SEAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE MOUNT CARMEL; APPOINTMENT THREE

ADDITIONAL COUNSELLORS NORTH CENTRAL AMERICA AUSTRALASIA;
ATTAINMENT GOAL SETTLEMENT MIDWAY POINT PLAN MAJORITY
PIONEERS CALLED FOR DURING FIRST PHASE ACCOMPANIED GREAT
OUTFLOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLING TEACHERS; DRAMATIC
RESURGENCE TEACHING WORK CRADLE FAITH BY INDIVIDUAL
BELIEVERS UNDER LOCAL PLANS; FINALLY, ELECTION THIS RIDVÁN SIX
NEW PILLARS UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE, NATIONAL SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLIES OF UPPER VOLTA IN AFRICA, OF THE FRENCH ANTILLES IN
THE CARIBBEAN, OF SURINAM AND FRENCH GUIANA IN SOUTH
AMERICA, OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS AND OF THE NEW HEBRIDES IN
PACIFIC OCEAN, AND OF GREECE IN EUROPE, RAISING TOTAL NUMBER
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES TO 123 TO TAKE PART IN FOURTH
ELECTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE IN HOLY LAND DURING
RIDVÁN 1978. NATIONAL CONVENTIONS IN 1978 WILL BE ON WEEKEND
PRECEDING OR FOLLOWING 23 MAY FEAST DECLARATION BÁB. CALL
FOR FORMATION AT THAT TIME SIX MORE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES:
BURUNDI AND MAURITANIA IN AFRICA, THE BAHAMAS IN AMERICA,
OMAN AND QATAR IN ASIA, AND THE MARIANA ISLANDS IN THE PACIFIC.
PRESENT RATE GROWTH COMMUNITY PROSPECT ACCELERATION
PROCESS ENTRY BY TROOPS ITS SPREAD NEW AREAS IMPEL US
STRENGTHEN STILL FURTHER THE AUXILIARY BOARDS WHOSE SERVICES
SO VITAL SOUND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY. ANNOUNCE
AUTHORIZATION INCREASE MEMBERSHIP BOARDS BY 297 RAISING
TOTAL TO 675 OF WHICH 279 ARE AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS FOR
PROTECTION AND 396 FOR PROPAGATION OF FAITH. IN EARLY DAYS OF
JUNE 1877 BAHÁ'U'LLÁH LEFT CITY 'Akká AND TOOK UP RESIDENCE IN
MAZRA'IH. TO MARK CENTENARY THIS TERMINATION CONFINEMENT
ANCIENT BEAUTY WITHIN WALLS PRISON-CITY WE CALL UPON HIS
FOLLOWERS ALL LANDS DEVOTE NINETEEN DAY FEAST OF NUR
COMMEMORATION HISTORIC EVENT, REDEDICATING THEMSELVES
URGENT TASKS BEFORE THEM, SO THAT PENT-UP ENERGIES HIS
PRECIOUS FAITH May BE RELEASED TO REACH EVER GREATER NUMBER
SEEKING SOULS IN EVER WIDER CIRCLE THEIR FELLOW-MEN. GREATEST
CHALLENGE FACING FOLLOWERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH LAST TWO YEARS PLAN
IS IN FIELDS EXPANSION CONSOLIDATION. TREMENDOUS UPSURGE
NEEDED IN SERVICES INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS ON WHOSE DEEDS
ULTIMATELY ALL PROGRESS DEPENDS. MOMENTUM GENERATED BY
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES MUST BE ACCELERATED WITHOUT
DELAY AND SPIRIT RELEASED MUST PERMEATE ALL COMMUNITIES.
GREAT INCREASE MUST TAKE PLACE IN ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHING

CARRIED OUT WITH CONFIDENCE, IMAGINATION AND PERSEVERANCE BY YOUNG AND OLD, RICH AND POOR, LEARNED AND ILLITERATE, WHETHER AT HOME OR TRAVELLING. PARTICULARLY CALL UPON BAHÁ'Í WOMEN, WHOSE CAPACITIES IN MANY LANDS STILL LARGELY UNUSED, AND WHOSE POTENTIAL FOR SERVICE CAUSE SO GREAT, TO ARISE AND DEMONSTRATE IMPORTANCE PART THEY ARE TO PLAY IN ALL FIELDS SERVICE FAITH. BOUNTIES IN ABUNDANCE WAITING DESCEND FROM SUPREME CONCOURSE. THAT THE FRIENDS OF GOD WILL NOW SURGE AHEAD WITH RESOLUTE RADIANT SPIRITS IN EVERY CONTINENT ISLANDS OF THE SEAS, TO BRING MESSAGE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH TO WAITING SOULS WIN THEIR ALLEGIANCE HIS CAUSE, ENSURING OVERWHELMING VICTORY PLAN TO WHICH THEY ARE NOW COMMITTED, IS OUR HIGH HOPE AND ARDENT PRAYER AT SACRED THRESHOLD.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1978

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1978

To the Friends gathered at National Bahá'í Conventions

Beloved Friends,

We joyfully hail the formation of seven more National Spiritual Assemblies, those of Burundi, Mauritania, the Bahamas, Oman, Qatar, the Mariana Islands and Cyprus; two in Africa, one in the Americas, two in Asia, one in the Pacific and one in Europe, raising to one hundred and thirty the number of pillars of the Universal House of Justice.

Your National Spiritual Assemblies will be sharing with you the message addressed to the International Bahá'í Convention and the news of the progress of the Five Year Plan that was released on that occasion. As you will see, many national communities have already completed, or virtually completed, their Five Year Plan goals. These communities must now ensure that the pace of expansion and consolidation which brought them victory is maintained so that they will advance strongly into the next plan. They can also, by pioneering and travel teaching, rally to the assistance of their sister communities which still have months of intensive work before them in order to win their goals. It is to these latter communities that we now address our call to redoubled, united and sacrificial effort. We are fervently supplicating at the Sacred Threshold that the followers of the Blessed Beauty will arise with enthusiasm, confidence and consecration to ensure that every goal is attained.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1978

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1978

To the International Bahá'í Convention

Dearly-Loved Friends,

The Universal House of Justice takes great pleasure in addressing the members of National Spiritual Assemblies gathered in the Holy Land, in the presence of Hands of the Cause of God and Counsellors from all continents, at this fourth International Convention, pausing with you to review the course and needs of the Five Year Plan as we cross the threshold of its final year.

The opening of the Plan witnessed the eager response of the friends, careful study made by the national institutions of the Faith of its implications and requirements, the establishment of machinery and the setting up of projects to achieve its goals, and the often arduous struggle to fulfil the first of its three major objectives—the safeguarding and consolidation of all prizes won in earlier campaigns. This phase extended in many countries over a period of several months, and in others continued as far as the midway point of the Plan.

The middle year of the Plan saw the holding of the International Conferences and those many regional and national conferences which were held concurrently and diffused far and wide the inspiration

flowing from these eight major assemblages of the believers. These gatherings motivated a great acceleration of the work and helped the believers throughout the world to arrive at a new realization of the responsibility entrusted to the followers of the Most Great Name for the spiritual regeneration of their fellow-men.

We are now in the last stage of the Plan, and this Convention provides us with a welcome and auspicious hour in which to assess our progress and to direct our thoughts to the complete achievement of the goals.

Of the 130 National Spiritual Assemblies which will be operating during the last year of the Plan, 50 have either achieved or nearly achieved their teaching goals. Of the remaining 80 National Spiritual Assemblies, some 40 are confidently forging ahead and are assured of victory if the present tempo in their teaching work is maintained. Nine National Assemblies are restricted by conditions which make the fulfilment of their homefront goals dependent upon circumstances beyond their control. The remaining 30 national communities are, alas, seriously lagging behind, and only strenuous and sacrificial effort will enable them to win their goals.

The second of the three major objectives of the Plan—a vast and widespread expansion of the Bahá'í community—has seen great but geographically uneven progress. There are now more than 19,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies and the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside is over 83,000. This expansion has been accompanied by an intensification of proclamation efforts and by increased use of mass media such as radio and television.

There have been notable advances in the process of gaining wider recognition for the Cause of God and in fostering cordial relations with civil authorities, a matter of vital importance in these days when there is a growth of opposition to the Faith from those who, misconstruing its true nature and aims, take alarm at its progress.

Some of the most significant achievements of the Plan have been towards its third major objective—the development of the distinctive character of Bahá'í life—and in the consolidation and strengthening of the structure of the Bahá'í community. The beloved Hands of the Cause of God, who have been in the forefront of so many aspects of the work of the Faith, have rendered far-reaching services in this field.

The Local Spiritual Assemblies, focal centres for the teaching of the Faith and the consolidation of the community, are growing in experience, maturity and wisdom, are proving to be potent instruments for nurturing the Bahá'í life and are, in increasing numbers, carrying out plans for the establishment of the Faith in areas outside their own range of jurisdiction, under the over-all guidance of their National Spiritual Assemblies, and with the encouragement and help of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants. The work of developing Local Spiritual Assemblies is a task without end in the foreseeable future. As the Bahá'í community, which is still very thinly spread around the world, moves continually and with increasing rapidity into new areas, new Assemblies will come into being and will need patient help and training in their sacred duties.

The devotion and self-sacrifice of the friends, which have drawn to them the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, have resulted in the very great advances made so far. Evidences of this striving are apparent in the growing number of national communities which, under the wise stewardship and challenging leadership of their National Spiritual Assemblies, are becoming financially self-supporting; in the fact that ever more individual believers are adopting for themselves specific goals and plans of service for the advancement of the Faith; in the settlement of more than 2,000 pioneers during the course of the Plan; in the upsurge of travel teaching individually and in teams; in a greater awareness of the power of prayer; and in many other ways. Three vital aspects of Bahá'í community life which have seen marked progress during the past four years are the development of the services of women and of youth, and the Bahá'í education of children. The youth have long been in the forefront of the teaching work, and now our hearts rejoice to see the women, in so many lands where previously their capacities were largely left unused, devoting

their capable services to the life of the Bahá'í community. The education of Bahá'í children is also receiving much attention, which bodes well for the future generations of Bahá'ís.

Experience has shown that active and loving collaboration between the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies has been a particularly invigorating and strengthening factor in the progress of the Cause in all aspects of the work. Reflecting the growth of the community, the number of Continental Counsellors has been raised to 64 during the Plan, and the number of Auxiliary Boards to 675. Under the authorization given to them, the members of the Auxiliary Boards have till now appointed 3,358 assistants, who are already playing a significant role in the formation and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the fostering of the Bahá'í way of life in local communities. Coordinating and directing the work of these Continental Boards from the Holy Land, the International Teaching Centre is now well established in the conduct of its responsibilities, foreshadowing the mighty role that it is destined to play in the functioning of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Faith is passing through a time of tremendous opportunity and development, as well as of increasing opposition and of growing complexity in the problems confronting it. These opportunities must be seized and these problems overcome, for so crucial are these times that the future course of human history is daily in the balance. During this year the Universal House of Justice will be consulting on the nature, duration and goals of the next stage in the implementation of the Divine Plan. The firm base of the achievement of the Five Year Plan goals, both those of quality and those of quantity, is therefore the burning necessity of the months now before us. Let us go forward in a spirit of optimism, with confidence, determination, courage and unity. The greater the love and unity among the friends, the more speedily will the work advance.

May the Almighty bless the endeavours of His servants and inspire their hearts to arise in His Cause with that degree of radiant faith and

self-sacrifice which will draw to their aid the conquering hosts of the Supreme Concourse.

The Universal House of Justice

March 1979

The Universal House of Justice

Naw-Rúz 1979

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá'í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellow-men throughout the planet. It must also bear particular tribulations. The violent disturbances in Persia, coinciding with the gathering in of the bountiful harvest of the Five Year Plan, have brought new and cruel hardships to our long-suffering brethren in the Cradle of our Faith and confronted the Bahá'í world community with critical challenges to its life and work. As the Bahá'í world stood poised on the brink of victory, eagerly anticipating the next stage in the unfoldment of the Master's Divine Plan, Bahá'u'lláh's heroic compatriots, the custodians of the Holy Places of our Faith in the land of its birth, were yet again called upon to endure the passions of brutal mobs, the looting and burning of their homes, the destruction of their means of livelihood, and physical violence and threats of death to force them to recant their faith. They, like their immortal forebears, the Dawn-Breakers, are standing steadfast in face of this new persecution and the ever-present threat of organized extermination.

Remembering that during the Five Year Plan the Persian friends far surpassed any other national community in their outpouring of pioneers and funds, we, in all those parts of the world where we are still free to promote the Cause of God, have the responsibility to make good their temporary inability to serve. Therefore, with uplifted hearts and radiant faith, we must arise with redoubled energy to pursue our mighty task, confident that the Lord of Hosts will continue to reward our efforts with the same bountiful grace He vouchsafed to us in the Five Year Plan.

The teaching victories in that Plan have been truly prodigious; the points of light, those localities where the Promised One is recognized, have increased from sixty-nine thousand five hundred to over ninety-six thousand; the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies has grown from seventeen thousand to over twenty-five thousand; eighteen new National Spiritual Assemblies have been formed. The final report will disclose in all their manifold aspects the magnitude of the victories won.

In the world at large the Bahá'í community is now firmly established. The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, the Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, is bearing a precious fruit in the development of the International Teaching Centre as a mighty institution of the World Centre of the Faith; an institution blessed by the membership of all the Hands of the Cause; an institution whose beneficent influence is diffused to all parts of the Bahá'í community through the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.

Advised, stimulated and supported by this vital arm of the Administrative Order, 125 National Spiritual Assemblies are rapidly acquiring experience and growing in wisdom as they administer the complex affairs of their respective communities as organic parts of one world-wide fellowship. More and more Local Spiritual Assemblies are becoming strong focal centres of local Bahá'í communities and firm pillars of the National Spiritual Assembly in each land. Even in those countries where the Bahá'í Administration cannot operate or has had to be disbanded, countries to which have

now been added Afghanistan, the Congo Republic, Niger, Uganda and Vietnam, the believers, while obedient to their governments, nevertheless staunchly keep alive the flame of faith.

Beyond the expansion of the community, vital as it is, the Five Year Plan witnessed great progress in the spiritual development of the friends, the growing maturity and wisdom of Local and National Assemblies, and in the degree to which Bahá'í communities embody the distinguishing characteristics of Bahá'í life and attract, by their unity, their steadfastness, their radiance and good reputation, the interest and eventual wholehearted support of their fellow-citizens. This is the magnet which will attract the masses to the Cause of God, and the leaven that will transform human society.

The conditions of the world present the followers of Bahá'u'lláh with both obstacles and opportunities. In an increasing number of countries we are witnessing the fulfilment of the warnings that the writings of our Faith contain. "Peoples, nations, adherents of divers faiths," the beloved Guardian wrote, "will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. For as the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh has invested the future Bahá'í Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines." In different countries, in varying degrees, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh at this very hour are undergoing such attacks, and are facing imprisonment and even martyrdom rather than deny the Truth for whose sake the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh drained the cup of sacrifice.

In other lands, such as those in Western Europe, the faithful believers have to struggle to convey the message in the face of widespread indifference, materialistic self-satisfaction, cynicism and moral degradation. These friends, however, still have freedom to teach the Faith in their homelands, and in spite of the discouraging meagreness of outward results they continue to proclaim the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to their fellow-citizens, to raise high the reputation of the

Cause in the public eye, to acquaint leaders of thought and those in authority with its true tenets, and to spare no effort to seek out those receptive souls in every town and village who will respond to the divine summons and devote their lives to its service.

In many lands, however, there is an eager receptivity for the teachings of the Faith. The challenge for the Bahá'ís is to provide these thousands of seeking souls, as swiftly as possible, with the spiritual food that they crave, to enlist them under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh, to nurture them in the way of life He has revealed, and to guide them to elect Local Spiritual Assemblies which, as they begin to function strongly, will unite the friends in firmly consolidated Bahá'í communities and become beacons of guidance and havens of refuge to mankind.

Faced by such a combination of danger and opportunity, the Bahá'ís, confident in the ultimate triumph of God's purpose for mankind, raise their eyes to the goals of a new Seven Year Plan.

In the Holy Land the strengthening of the World Centre and the augmentation of its worldwide influence must continue:

- The Seat of the Universal House of Justice will be completed and designs will be adopted for the remaining three buildings of the World Administrative Centre of the Faith.

- The Institution of the International Teaching Centre will be developed and its functions expanded. This will require an increase in its membership and the assumption by it and by the Continental Boards of Counsellors of wider functions in the stimulation on an international scale of the propagation and consolidation of the Faith,

and in the promotion of the spiritual, intellectual and community aspects of Bahá'í life.

- The House of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá in ‘Akká will be opened to pilgrimage.

- Work will be continued on the collation and classification of the Sacred Texts and a series of compilations gleaned and translated from the writings of the Faith will be sent out to the Bahá'í world to help in deepening the friends in their understanding of the fundamentals of the Faith, enriching their spiritual lives, and reinforcing their efforts to teach the Cause.

- The ties binding the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations will be further developed.

- Continued efforts will be made to protect the Faith from opposition and to emancipate it from the fetters of persecution.

Each National Spiritual Assembly has been given goals for these first two years of the Plan, designed to continue the process of expansion, to consolidate the victories won, and to attain, where circumstances permit, any goals that may have had to remain unaccomplished at the end of the Five Year Plan. During these first two years we shall be examining, with the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, the conditions and possibilities in each country, and shall be considering in detail the capacities and needs of each of

the rapidly differentiating national Bahá'í communities before formulating the further goals towards which each community is to work following the opening phase of the Plan.

Throughout the world the Seven Year Plan must witness the attainment of the following objectives:

- The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Samoa is to be completed and progress will be made in the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in India.
- Nineteen new National Spiritual Assemblies are to be brought into being: eight in Africa, those of Angola, Bophuthatswana, the Cape Verde Islands, Gabon, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia and Transkei; eight in the Americas, those of Bermuda, Dominica, French Guiana, Grenada, the Leeward Islands, Martinique, St. Lucia and St. Vincent; and three in the Pacific, those of the Cook Islands, Tuvalu and the West Caroline Islands. Those National Spiritual Assemblies which have had to be dissolved will, circumstances permitting, be re-established.
- The Message of Bahá'u'lláh must be taken to territories and islands which are as yet unopened to His Faith.
- The teaching work, both that organized by institutions of the Faith and that which is the fruit of individual initiative, must be actively carried forward so that there will be growing numbers of believers,

leading more countries to the stage of entry by troops and ultimately to mass conversion.

– This teaching work must include prompt, thorough and continuing consolidation so that all victories will be safeguarded, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies will be increased and the foundations of the Cause reinforced.

– The interchange of pioneers and travelling teachers, which contributes so importantly to the unity of the Bahá'í world and to a true understanding of the oneness of mankind, must continue, especially between neighbouring lands. At the same time, each national Bahá'í community must aspire to a rapid achievement of self-sufficiency in carrying out its vital activities, thus acquiring the capacity to continue to function and grow even if outside help is cut off.

– Especially in finance is the attainment of independence by national Bahá'í communities urgent. Already the persecutions in Iran have deprived the believers in that country of the bounty of contributing to the international funds of the Faith, of which they have been a major source. Economic disruption in other countries threatens further diminution of financial resources. We therefore appeal to the

friends everywhere to exercise the utmost economy in the use of funds and to make those sacrifices in their personal lives which will enable them to contribute their share, according to their means, to the local, national, continental and international funds of the Faith.

– For the prompt achievement of all the goals and the healthy growth of Bahá'í community life National Spiritual Assemblies must pay particular attention to the efficient functioning, in the true spirit of the Faith, of their national committees and other auxiliary institutions, and, in consultation with the Continental Boards of Counsellors, must conceive and implement programs that will guide and reinforce the efforts of the friends in the path of service.

– National Spiritual Assemblies must promote wise and dignified approaches to people prominent in all areas of human endeavour, acquainting them with the nature of the Bahá'í community and the basic tenets of the Faith, and winning their esteem and friendship.

– At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigour of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá'í communities;

the nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá'í family life; the Bahá'í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá'í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá'í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá'í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community—may they befittingly bear witness to the memory of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the immortal heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of her passing.

As lawlessness spreads in the world, as governments rise and fall, as rival groups and feuding peoples struggle, each for its own advantage, the plight of the oppressed and the deprived wrings the heart of every true Bahá'í, tempting him to cry out in protest or to arise in wrath at the perpetrators of injustice. For this is a time of testing which calls to mind Bahá'u'lláh's words, "O concourse of the heedless! I swear by God! The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: 'Taste ye what your hands have wrought!'"

Now is the time when every follower of Bahá'u'lláh must cling fast to the Covenant of God, resist every temptation to become embroiled in the conflicts of the world, and remember that he is the holder of a precious trust, the Message of God which, alone, can banish injustice from the world and cure the ills afflicting the body and spirit of man. We are the bearers of the Word of God in this day and, however dark the immediate horizons, we must go forward rejoicing in the knowledge that the work we are privileged to perform is God's work and will bring to birth a world whose splendour will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.

The Universal House of Justice

March 1980

The Universal House of Justice

Naw-Rúz 1980

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The successful launching of the Seven Year Plan and the advances made in the first year of its opening phase mitigate, in some degree, the disasters and calamities which, in the past year, have assailed the struggling Faith of God. The newest wave of persecution unleashed against us in the Cradle of our Faith has been compounded by Divine decree afflicting the entire Bahá'í world community. In the full tide of their brilliant services to the Faith of God, and within the short span of twenty weeks three Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Order, the Hands of the Cause of God Enoch Olinga, Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir and Hasan Balyuzi were summoned to the Abhá Kingdom, leaving the rest of us bereft and shocked by the enormity of our loss and the tragic brutality of the circumstances attending the murder of beloved Enoch Olinga and members of his family.

In Iran, the confusion which has seized the whole country opened the way for the fierce and inveterate enemies of the Faith, unrestrained by any effective authority, to indulge their fanatical hatred. The Holy House of the Báb has been demolished and proposals have been made to erase its very site. The Síyáh-Chál and Bahá'u'lláh's Home in Tíhrán have been seized, together with all other Holy Places and properties. One member of the National Spiritual Assembly and two of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán have been kidnapped and

the whereabouts of two of them is still unknown, while the third is still in prison. Also, a Counsellor and some friends who are associated with the National Office or are members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán have been imprisoned. Bahá'ís have been heavily pressed to recant their faith and in one case a believer, who refused to do so, followed the glorious path of the martyrs and was executed. Beyond all this a campaign of vilification and false charges has been conducted against the friends in an effort to make them the scapegoat of unrestrained mobs.

And yet, as ever in the Cause of God, the beneficent operation of the dialectic of disaster and triumph is clearly apparent. The unwavering faith of the dearly-loved, severely-tested, ever-steadfast Persian Bahá'í community, guided by the heroic stand and example of its National Spiritual Assembly, supported and inspired by the Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board members, has effected a spiritual revitalization of the beloved friends. They have united as one man to present a front of refulgent spirituality and assurance and appear, as one observer reports, like a dazzling community of eager, uplifted, radiant new believers.

Nor is the influence of their response to the sufferings engulfing them confined to their homeland. From farthest east to farthest west, from pole to pole, wherever the Standard of Bahá'u'lláh has been implanted, the friends have felt the impulse of sacrifice and risen to assume that enormous share of the work of the Faith in the fields of teaching, pioneering and financial contribution which the Persian friends, for the time being, are no longer able to shoulder.

The wonderful love aroused in Bahá'í hearts everywhere by the sudden, untimely passing of the beloved Hands of the Cause has moved the believers to dedicate themselves anew with increased ardour and self-sacrifice to the promotion of the work to which all the Hands of the Cause of God have dedicated their lives.

The world-wide response of the friends to these tragedies is the more heartening in view of the clear warnings voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and

the beloved Guardian of the fierce and widespread opposition which the increasing growth of the Cause of God will arouse. There is no doubt of this. Shoghi Effendi called attention to “the extent and character of the forces that are destined to contest with God’s holy Faith”, and supported his argument with “these prophetic and ominous words” from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“HOW GREAT, HOW VERY GREAT IS THE CAUSE! HOW VERY FIERCE THE ONSLAUGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLES AND KINDREDS OF THE EARTH! ERE LONG SHALL THE CLAMOUR OF THE MULTITUDE THROUGHOUT AFRICA, THROUGHOUT AMERICA, THE CRY OF THE EUROPEAN AND OF THE TURK, THE GROANING OF INDIA AND CHINA, BE HEARD FROM FAR AND NEAR. ONE AND ALL THEY SHALL ARISE WITH ALL THEIR POWER TO RESIST HIS CAUSE. THEN SHALL THE KNIGHTS OF THE LORD, ASSISTED BY HIS GRACE FROM ON HIGH, STRENGTHENED BY FAITH, AIDED BY THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING, AND REINFORCED BY THE LEGIONS OF THE COVENANT, ARISE AND MAKE MANIFEST THE TRUTH OF THE VERSE: ‘BEHOLD THE CONFUSION THAT HATH BEFALLEN THE TRIBES OF THE DEFEATED!’”

The beloved Guardian expatiated at length upon this theme and its inevitable outcome: “Stupendous as is the struggle which His words foreshadow, they also testify to the complete victory which the upholders of the Greatest Name are destined eventually to achieve.”

Now, therefore, it is our sacred duty to make the utmost use of our freedom, wherever it exists, to promote the Cause of God while we may. The surest way to do this and to win the good-pleasure of Bahá'u'lláh is to pursue, with dedication and unrelenting vigour, the goals of whatever Plan is in force, for Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "To assist Me is to teach My Cause."

A good start has been made with the Seven Year Plan. At the World Centre of the Faith the uninterrupted progress in raising the Seat of the House of Justice, repairing and refurbishing the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá, further extension of the gardens surrounding the Haram-i-Aqdas at Bahjí, and the initiation of a general reorganization of the work of the World Centre to accommodate its ever-growing needs and make use of the most up-to-date technological developments, have taken place.

In the international sphere the enthusiasm with which the friends everywhere greeted the launching of the Seven Year Plan and girded themselves to achieve the goals of the first two-year phase, their generous and sacrificial outpouring of funds, the confident and sustained efforts exerted to carry forward the two sacred enterprises initiated in the Indian subcontinent and at the heart of the vast Pacific Ocean, the constant activity of the Bahá'í International Community in fostering its relations with the United Nations, the great increase in the number of children's Bahá'í classes and the innumerable victories won in the teaching field, recorded by the establishment of the world-wide community of the Most Great Name in over 106,000 localities, all testify to the unassailable, and indeed ever-increasing vigour of the Cause of God.

The number of pioneers and travelling teachers who have entered the field during the first year of the Seven Year Plan, and the increase in the number of national communities which have sent them out are highly encouraging. This stream of pioneers and travelling teachers must be increased and more widely diffused, and we fervently hope that, at the very least, all those pioneers filling the assigned goals of the first phase of the Seven Year Plan will be at their posts by Ridván 1981.

In the field of proclamation unprecedented publicity has been accorded the Cause of God, chiefly as a result of the persecutions in Iran. In addition significant gains have been made in the Bahá'í radio operation in South America, where short wave transmission has greatly extended the range of Radio Bahá'í in Otavalo, Ecuador, and where a new station is being established in Puno, in Peru, on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Both these achievements offer immeasurable new opportunities for the teaching, proclamation and consolidation of the Cause in that area.

In 88 languages of the world the supply of Bahá'í literature has been enriched, while three new languages have been added to bring to 660 the number of those in which Bahá'í material is available.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Transkei with its seat in Umtata will be formed at Ridván 1980. At Ridván 1981 six new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed; two in Africa, Namibia with its seat in Windhoek, and Bophuthatswana with its seat in Mmabatho; three in the Americas, the Leeward Islands with its seat in St. John's, Antigua, the Windward Islands with its seat in Kingstown, St. Vincent, and Bermuda with its seat in Hamilton; one in Australasia, Tuvalu with its seat in Funafuti. With great joy we announce the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda, to take place at Ridván 1981.

In the course of the coming year, the Universal House of Justice, in consultation with the International Teaching Centre, will review the accomplishments of the initial phase and will then announce to all National Spiritual Assemblies the goals towards which they should strive in the next stage of the Seven Year Plan.

During this final year of the initial phase National Spiritual Assemblies are urged to continue their wise and dignified approaches to people prominent in all areas of human endeavour in order to acquaint them with the nature and spirit of the Faith and to win their esteem and friendship. At the same time vigorous campaigns must be continually mounted to proclaim more and more directly and to as

large audiences as possible the existence and basic principles of the Faith of God. Now is the time, as all human endeavours to repair the old order only result in deeper and deeper confusion, to proclaim constantly and openly the claims of the Faith and the redemptive power of Bahá'u'lláh.

The marvellous momentum generated at the beginning of the Plan and now propelling the Bahá'í world community forward to the achievement of the immediate objectives of the initial phase must be maintained and indeed accelerated, so that firm foundations in the spiritual life of the community may be laid and its forces gathered for the winning of the specific tasks with which it will be challenged in the major part of the Plan.

Our hearts go out in love and admiration to the friends in Iran and in gratitude to the believers throughout the world for their spontaneous defence of their persecuted brethren and their shouldering of the load which must, at all costs, be borne.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

March 1981

The Universal House of Justice

March 1981

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The successes of the initial phase of the Seven Year Plan are heartening evidence of the Divine care with which the growth of the Cause of God is so lovingly invigorated and sheltered. This still infant Cause, harassed and buffeted over these two years by relentless enemies, experiencing in swift succession a number of sharply contrasting crises and victories, surrounded by the increasing turmoil of a disintegrating world, has raised its banner, reinforced its foundations, and extended the range of its administrative institutions.

The resurgence of bitter and barbaric persecution of the Faith in the land of its birth, the passing to the Abhá Kingdom of five Hands of the Cause of God, the darkening of the horizons of the world as the sombre shadows of universal convulsions and chaos extinguish the lights of justice and order, are among the factors which have chiefly affected the conditions and fortunes of the worldwide army of God.

The Bahá'í community in the Cradle of the Faith, having witnessed the destruction of its holiest Shrine, the sequestration of its Holy Places, confiscation of its endowments and even personal properties, the martyrdom of many of its adherents, the imprisonment and holding without trial or news of the members of its National Spiritual Assembly and other leading figures of its community, the deprivation of the means of livelihood, vilification and slander of its cherished

tenets, has stood staunch as the Dawn-Breakers of old and emerged spiritually united and steadfast, the pride and inspiration of the entire Bahá'í world. In all continents of the globe, their example and hapless plight has led the friends to proclaim the Name of Bahá'u'lláh as never before, personally, locally, and through all the media of mass communication. The Bahá'í world community, acting through its representatives at the United Nations and through its National Spiritual Assemblies, has brought to the attentive of governments and world leaders in many spheres the tenets and character of the Faith of God. The world's parliaments, its federal councils, its humanitarian agencies have considered the Bahá'í Cause and in many instances have extended their support and expressed their sympathy.

In the midst of this time-and energy-consuming activity on behalf of our beloved Persian brethren, the community of the Most Great Name, far from lessening its pursuit of the objectives of the initial phase of the Seven Year Plan, has promoted them with increasing vigour. Added to the burning desire of the friends everywhere to show their love for their brethren in Persia by teaching the Cause with redoubled fervour, has been the further inspiration to teach derived from the loss of the beloved Hands of the Cause, an inspiration which has been fostered by the travels of those dear Hands still able to extend this loving service to the believers.

The broadening, during this opening phase of the Seven Year Plan, of the foundations of the Boards of Counsellors and the consolidation of the thirteen zonal Boards to five continental ones have greatly reinforced this vital institution of the Faith. It has been further developed by the setting of a specified term of office for Continental Counsellors, as was envisaged in the original appointments.

Progress on the Seat of the Universal House of Justice and on the Temples of India and Samoa has continued. Six new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed during this Riḍván: two in Africa, that of South West Africa/Namibia with its seat in Windhoek and that of Bophuthatswana with its seat in Mmabatho; three in the Americas, Bermuda with its seat in Hamilton, the Leeward Islands

with its seat in St. John's, Antigua, and the Windward Islands with its seat in Kingstown, St. Vincent; one in the Pacific, namely that of Tuvalu with its seat in Funafuti; and the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda will be reconstituted. To those to be formed during the remainder of the Seven Year Plan, the following have been added: two in Africa, Equatorial Guinea with its seat in Malabo, Somalia with its seat in Mogadishu, and one in Asia, that of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with its seat in Port Blair.

Increases in the total number of Local Spiritual Assemblies and localities have been registered during the opening phase, and Bahá'í communities in all parts of the world have demonstrated greater unity and maturity in their collective activities.

The second phase of the Seven Year Plan, now opening, will last for three years and will be followed by the final phase of two years, ending at Ridván 1986. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the passing of our beloved Guardian will occur during the second year of the second phase of the Plan and that same year will also witness the fifth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf. The House of Justice plans to issue a compilation of letters to her and of statements about her by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the beloved Guardian, and of her own letters.

All National Spiritual Assemblies have been sent the goals assigned to their communities for the second phase, for the prosecution of which the Bahá'í world community now stands poised and ready. Among the major developments envisioned during this phase are:

Occupation by the Universal House of Justice of its permanent Seat on the slopes of Mount Carmel above the Arc;

Completion of the Temple in Samoa and continued progress on the work of the Temple in India;

Further development of the functions of the International Teaching Centre and the Boards of Counsellors, with special reference to the promotion of the spiritual, intellectual, and social life of the Bahá'í community;

The holding, during the first nine months of 1982, of five international conferences, in Lagos, Nigeria; Montreal, Canada; Quito, Ecuador; Dublin, Ireland; and Manila, the Philippines, this last one taking place at the mid-point of an axis, referred to by the beloved Guardian, whose poles are Japan and Australia;

Preparation of architect's plans for the first dependency of the European Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, namely, a Home for the Aged, and an increase in the number of national and local Hazíratu'l-Quds; the latter, which will be particularly in rural areas, are to be acquired or built through the efforts of the local friends;

Acquisition of six new Temple sites, five in Africa and one in Australasia; and of five new national endowments, four in Africa and one in the Americas;

Formation of two Publishing Trusts, one in the Ivory Coast and one in Nigeria;

A great increase in the production of Bahá'í literature in an increasing number of languages, the ultimate aim being to enable every believer to have some portion of the Sacred Text available in his native tongue;

Completion of three more radio stations in South America;

Great attention to the development and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world;

Development of Bahá'í community life with special attention to the Bahá'í education of children and the spiritual enrichment of communities;

The settlement of 279 pioneers in 80 countries during the first year of the second phase.

Liberal and increased contributions to the various Funds of the Faith will be essential if the above-mentioned tasks are to be successfully pursued. Furthermore, the now observable emergence from obscurity of our beloved Faith will impose the necessity of new undertakings involving large calls on the Funds. The growing awareness of the friends throughout the world in the past few years that the Funds of the Faith are indeed the life-blood of its activities is a heartening augury for the future. We are confident that this awareness will increase, that more National Spiritual Assemblies will make great strides towards financial independence, that national budgets will be met, and the Bahá'í International Fund will receive an ever-increasing outpouring of contributions enabling that Fund to keep pace with the ever-increasing international needs of the Faith.

Beloved friends, the world moves deeper into the heart of darkness as its old order is rolled up. Pursing our objectives with confidence, optimism, and an unshakable resolve, we must never forget that our service is a spiritual one. Mankind is dying for lack of true religion and this is what we have to offer to humanity. It is the love of God, manifest in the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh, which will feed the hungry souls of the world and eventually lead the peoples out of the present morass into the orderly, uplifting, and soul-inspiring task of establishing God's Kingdom on earth.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1982

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1982

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

Triumphs of inestimable portent for the unfoldment of the Cause of God, many of them resulting directly from the steadfast heroism of the beloved Persians in face of the savage persecutions meted out to them, have characterized the year just ending. The effect of these developments is to offer such golden opportunities for teaching and further proclamation as can only lead, if vigorously and enthusiastically seized, to large-scale conversion and an increasing prestige.

Heartwarming progress in the construction of the Indian and Western Samoan Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the opening of the second Bahá'í radio station of Latin America in Peru, the establishment of the European office of the Bahá'í International Community in Geneva, steady advances in the second phase of the Seven Year Plan, encouraging expansion of the systematized Bahá'í education of children, sacrifice and generous outpouring of funds from a growing number of friends, all testify to the abundant confirmations with which Bahá'u'lláh rewards the dedicated efforts of His loved ones throughout the world. The world-wide attention accorded the Faith in the media, which has opened wide the doors of mass proclamation of the divine Message, and the sympathetic discussion of it in the highest councils of mankind with the resulting actions taken by sovereign governments and international authorities, are unprecedented in Bahá'í history.

All this, dear friends, augurs well for the coming year which is rich in Bahá'í occasions. The fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf will be commemorated at the five International Conferences and by the publication of a book, compiled at the World Centre, comprising texts about her and some hundred of her own letters; the move to the permanent Seat of the Universal House of Justice will take place; in November the twenty-fifth anniversary of the passing of our beloved Guardian will coincide with the midway point of the Seven Year Plan and the year will terminate with the fifth International Convention when members of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world will come to Haifa to elect the Universal House of Justice.

The distinguished and invaluable activities of the beloved Hands of the Cause are a source of pride and joy to the entire Bahá'í world. The assumption of wider responsibilities by each Continental Board of Counsellors is proving an unqualified success and we express our warm thanks and admiration to the International Teaching Centre and all the Counsellors for the great contribution they are making, in increasing measure, to the stability and development of the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

As to Bahá'í youth, legatees of the heroic early believers and now standing on their shoulders, we call upon them to redouble their efforts, in this day of widespread interest in the Cause of God, to enthuse their contemporaries with the divine Message and thus prepare themselves for the day when they will be veteran believers able to assume whatever tasks may be laid upon them. We offer them this passage from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh:

“Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.”

The rising sun of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is having its visible effect upon the world and upon the Bahá'í community itself. Opportunities, long dreamed of for teaching, attended by showering confirmations, now challenge in ever-increasing numbers, every individual believer, every Local and National Spiritual Assembly. The potent seeds sown by 'Abdu'l-Bahá are beginning to germinate within the divinely-ordained Order expounded and firmly laid by the beloved Guardian. Humanity is beaten almost to its knees, bewildered and shepherdless, hungry for the bread of life. This is our day of service; we have that heavenly food to offer. The peoples are disillusioned with deficient political theories, social systems and orders; they crave, knowingly or unknowingly, the love of God and reunion with Him. Our response to this growing challenge must be a mighty upsurge of effective teaching, imparting the divine fire which Bahá'u'lláh has kindled in our hearts until a conflagration arising from millions of souls on fire with His love shall at last testify that the Day for which the Chief Luminaries of our Faith so ardently prayed has at last dawned.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1983

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 140 B.E.

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved friends,

The observable acceleration, during the past decade, of the two processes described by our beloved Guardian, the disintegration of the old order and the progress and consolidation of the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, may well come to be regarded by future historians as one of the most remarkable features of this period. The recent increase in this very acceleration is even more remarkable. Both within and without the Cause of God, powerful forces are operating to bring to a climax the twin tendencies of this portentous century. Among the many evidences which reveal this process may be cited, on the one hand, the continual increase of lawlessness, terrorism, economic confusion, immorality and the growing danger from the proliferation of weapons of destruction, and on the other, the world-wide, divinely propelled expansion, consolidation and rapid emergence into the limelight of world affairs of the Cause itself, a process crowned by the wonderful efflorescence of Mount Carmel, the mountain of God, whose Divine springtime is now so magnificently burgeoning.

During the past five years, the historical dialectic of triumph and disaster has operated simultaneously within the Cause of God. The Army of Light has sustained the loss of six Hands of the Cause and waves of bitter persecution which have again engulfed the long-suffering community in Iran, and have resulted in the razing of the

House of the Báb, the demolition of Bahá'u'lláh's ancestral home in Takur, and the martyrdom of scores of valiant souls. Yet these disasters have called forth fresh energies in the hearts of the friends, have fed the deep roots of the Cause and given rise to a great harvest of signal victories. Chief among these are the successful conclusion of the Five Year Plan; the launching of the Seven Year Plan, now in the final year of its second phase and unprecedented proclamation of the Faith to Heads of States, parliaments and parliamentarians, government ministers and officials, leaders of thought and people prominent in the professions, resulting in a change of attitude on the part of the mass media, which now increasingly approach us for information about the Cause.

To these movements must be added the world-wide observances commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf; the completion of the restoration of the upper floor of the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá, and its opening, at this very time, to its first visitors; the occupation by the Universal House of Justice of its permanent Seat, in further fulfilment of the great prophecy in the Tablet of Carmel; steady progress on the construction of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Pacific Islands in Samoa and the Mother Temple of the Indian Subcontinent in New Delhi.

Among the outstanding features of the teaching and consolidation work are the continuing effective results of the participation of more than sixteen thousand believers from all parts of the world in the five International Conferences; intensive teaching campaigns carried out with the active support of all levels of the community and drawing upon the enthusiasm and capacity of Bahá'í youth; the establishment of a second radio station in South America; the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Uganda and Nepal, and the establishment of nine new National Spiritual Assemblies, two of which will be elected during the month of May this year, bringing the total of these secondary Houses of Justice to 135.

Above and beyond all these is the unity in action achieved by the Bahá'í world community in its efforts to enlist public support for the dearly-loved, greatly-admired, cruelly-beleaguered Iranian believers,

a unity further manifested in an outpouring of funds to replace their former liberal contributions, and an upsurge of personal dedication rarely seen on so universal a scale and holding the highest promise for the future.

The growing maturity of a world-wide religious community which all these processes indicate is further evidenced in the reaching out, by a number of national communities, to the social and economic life of their countries, exemplified by the founding of tutorial schools, the inception of radio stations, the pursuit of rural development programs and the operation of medical and agricultural schemes. To these early beginnings must be added the undoubted skills acquired, as a result of the Iranian crisis, in dealing with international organizations, national governments and the mass media—the very elements of society with which it must increasingly collaborate toward the realization of peace on earth.

A wider horizon is opening before us, illumined by a growing and universal manifestation of the inherent potentialities of the Cause for ordering human affairs. In this light can be discerned not only our immediate tasks but, more dimly, new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must shortly become engaged. At present we must complete the objectives of the Seven Year Plan, paying great attention to those inner spiritual developments which will be manifested in greater unity among the friends and in National and Local Spiritual Assemblies functioning “harmoniously, vigorously and efficiently” as the Guardian desired.

We have no doubt that the Bahá'í world community will accomplish all these tasks and go forward to new achievements. The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the

prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind. It is a time for rejoicing. The Sun of Bahá'u'lláh is mounting the heavens, bringing into ever clearer light the contrast between the gloom, the despair, the frustrations and bewilderment of the world, and the radiance, confidence, joy and certitude of His lovers. Lift up your hearts. The Day of God is here.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1984

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1984

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The emergence from obscurity, which has been so marked a feature of the Cause of God during the first five years of the Seven Year Plan, has been attended by changes, both external and internal, affecting the Bahá'í world community. Externally, there are signs of a crystallization of a public image of the Cause—largely uninformed, however friendly—while internally growing maturity and confidence are indicated by increased administrative ability, a desire for Bahá'í communities to render service to the larger body of mankind and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the divine Message to modern problems. Both these aspects of change must be taken into consideration as we enter the third and final phase of the Seven Year Plan.

The year just closing has been overshadowed by the continued persecution of the friends in Iran. They have been forced to disband their administrative structure, they have been harassed, dispossessed, dismissed from employment, made homeless and their children are refused education. Some six hundred men, women and children are now in prison, some denied any contact with their friends and relatives, some subjected to torture and all under pressure to recant their faith. Their heroic and exemplary steadfastness has been the mainspring in bringing the Cause out of obscurity, and it is the consolation of their hearts that their suffering results in

unprecedented advances in teaching and proclaiming the divine Message to a world so desperately in need of its healing power. For this they embrace the final service of martyrdom. Our obligation is crystal clear. We cannot fail them now. Sacrificial action in teaching and promoting the Cause of God must follow every new instance of publicity arising from their persecution. Let this be our message to them of love and spiritual union.

In the international sphere, the beloved Hands of the Cause, ever-growing in our love and admiration, have, whenever their health has permitted, continued to uplift and encourage the friends and to promote the unity and onward march of the army of life. The International Teaching Centre, operating from its world seat, has provided loving and wise leadership and direction to the Boards of Counsellors. Its sphere of service has been immensely extended by the assignment of new responsibilities and by raising the number of its Counsellor members to seven. The dedicated services of the Counsellors in all the continents, ably supported by the Auxiliary Board members, have been invaluable in fostering the spiritual health and integrity of the world wide community. To develop further this vital organ of the Administrative Order, it has been decided to establish a term of five years' service for those appointed to the Auxiliary Boards, commencing November 26, 1986. The work of the Bahá'í International Community in relationship with the United Nations has brought increasing appreciation of our social attitudes and principles, and in some instances—notably the sessions on human rights—the Bahá'í participation has been spectacular, again resulting from the heroism of the Persian friends. The Geneva office has been consolidated and additional staff engaged to deal with its expanding activities. In spite of severe problems the construction of the Indian and Samoan Houses of Worship has progressed satisfactorily, and the latter will be dedicated and opened to public worship between August 30th and September 3rd 1984, when the Universal House of Justice will be represented by the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Immediately following the International Convention last Ridván, two new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed—in St. Lucia and Dominica. Two new radio stations will make their inaugural broadcasts this year, namely Radio Bahá'í of Bolivia, at Caracallo, and WLGI, the Bahá'í radio station at the Louis Gregory Institute, in the United States. Bahá'í membership in eleven countries,

all in the Third World and nine of them island communities, have reached or surpassed one per cent of the total population.

During the final months of the second phase of the Seven Year Plan a generous response has been made by believers and institutions alike to an appeal which set out the increasing needs of the International Fund. We are confident that sustained and regular contributions during the final phase of the Plan will enable its aims and objectives to be fully accomplished.

The entrance of the Cause onto the world scene is apparent from a number of public statements in which we have been characterized as “model citizens”, “gentle”, “law-abiding”, “not guilty of any political offence or crime”; all excellent but utterly inadequate insofar as the reality of the Faith and its aims and purposes are concerned. Nevertheless people are willing to hear about the Faith, and the opportunity must be seized. Persistently greater and greater efforts must be made to acquaint the leaders of the world, in all departments of life, with the true nature of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation as the sole hope for the pacification and unification of the world. Simultaneous with such a programme must be unabated, vigorous pursuit of the teaching work, so that we may be seen to be a growing community, while universal observance by the friends of the Bahá'í laws of personal living will assert the fulness of, and arouse a desire to share in, the Bahá'í way of life. By all these means the public image of the Faith will become, gradually but constantly, nearer to its true character.

The upsurge of zeal throughout the Bahá'í world for exploration of the new dimension of social and economic development is both heartwarming and uplifting to all our hopes. This energy within the community, carefully and wisely directed, will undoubtedly bring about a new era of consolidation and expansion, which in turn will attract further widespread attention, so that both aspects of change in the Bahá'í world community will be interactive and mutually propelling.

A prime element in the careful and wise direction needed is the achievement of victory in the Seven Year Plan, paying great attention to the development and strengthening of Local Assemblies. Great efforts must be made to encourage them to discharge their primary duties of meeting regularly, holding the Nineteen Day Feasts and observing Holy Days, organizing children's classes, encouraging the practice of family prayers, undertaking extension teaching projects, administering the Bahá'í Fund and constantly encouraging and leading their communities in all Bahá'í activities. The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practising this Bahá'í principle. Bahá'í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities. Bahá'í youth, now rendering exemplary and devoted service in the forefront of the army of life, must be encouraged, even while equipping themselves for future service, to devise and execute their own teaching plans among their contemporaries.

Now, as we enter the final, two year phase of the Seven Year Plan, we rejoice in the addition of nine new National Spiritual Assemblies; three in Africa, three in the Americas, two in Asia, one in Europe, bringing the total number to 143. Five more are to be established in Ridván 1985. They are Ciskei, Mali and Mozambique in Africa and the Cook Islands and the West Caroline Islands in Australasia. Thus the Plan will end with a minimum of 148 National Spiritual Assemblies. By that time plans must be approved for the completion of the arc around the Monument Gardens on Mount Carmel, including the siting and designs of the three remaining buildings to be constructed around that arc.

There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá'í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an

unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.

Accompanying this Riḍván message are a call for 298 pioneers to settle in 79 national communities, and specific messages addressed to each of the present 143 national communities. They are the fruit of intensive study and consultation by the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre, and set out the goals to be won and the objectives to be pursued by each national community so that Riḍván 1986 may witness the completion in glorious victory of this highly significant Plan. It will have run its course through a period of unprecedented world confusion, bearing witness to the vitality, the irresistible advance and socially creative power of the Cause of God, standing out in sharp contrast to the accelerating decline in the fortunes of the generality of mankind.

Beloved Friends, the bounties and protection with which the Blessed Beauty is nurturing and sheltering the infant organism of His new world order through this violent period of transition and trial, give ample assurance of victories to come if we but follow the path of His guidance. He rewards our humble efforts with effusions of grace which bring not only advancement to the Cause but assurance and happiness to our hearts, so that we may indeed look upon our neighbours with bright and shining faces, confident that from our services now will eventuate that blissful future which our descendants will inherit, glorifying Bahá'u'lláh, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of Mankind.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1985

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1985

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

As we enter the final year of the Seven Year Plan, confidence of victory and a growing sense of the opening of a new stage in the onward march of the Faith must arouse in every Bahá'í heart feelings of gratitude and eager expectation. Victory in the Plan is now within sight, and at its completion the summation of its achievements may well astonish us all. But the great, the historic feature of this period is the emergence of the Faith from obscurity, promoted by the steadfast heroism of the renowned, the indefatigable, dearly-loved Bahá'í community of Bahá'u'lláh's and the Báb's native land.

This dramatic change in the status of the Faith of God, occurring at so chaotic a moment in the world's history when statesmen and leaders and governors of human institutions are witnessing, with increasing despair, the bankruptcy and utter ineffectiveness of their best efforts to stay the tide of disruption, forces upon us, the Bahá'ís, the obligation to consider anew and ponder deeply the beloved Guardian's statement that "The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—. . . implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."

Intimations in the non-Bahá'í world of a rapidly growing realization that mankind is indeed entering a new stage in its evolution present us

with unprecedented opportunities to show that the Bahá'í world community is not only "the nucleus but the very pattern" of that world society which it is the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh to establish and towards which a harassed humanity, albeit largely unconsciously, is striving.

The time has come for the Bahá'í community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world's moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence.

Bahá'í Youth are taking advantage of the United Nations' designation of 1985 as the Year of Youth to launch their own campaign of active co-operation with other youth groups, sharing with them Bahá'í ideals and a vision of what they intend to make of the world. The Bahá'í community will be strongly represented at the culminating event of the United Nations' Decade of Women in this same year. 1986 has been named the Year of Peace, and the Faith will be far from silent or obscure on that issue. Even now the House of Justice is making plans for the presentation of the Bahá'í concepts on peace to the governments and leaders of the world and, through the Bahá'í world community, to its national and local authorities and to all sections of the variegated world society. But it is in the local Bahá'í communities that the most widespread presentation of the Faith can take place. It is here that the real pattern of Bahá'í life can be seen. It is here that the power of Bahá'u'lláh to organize human affairs on a basis of spiritual unity can be most apparent. Every Local Spiritual Assembly which unitedly strives to grow in maturity and efficiency and encourages its community to fulfil its destiny as a foundation stone of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order can add to a growing ground swell of interest in and eventual recognition of the Cause of God as the sole hope for mankind.

Such considerations as these are now occupying the earnest attention of the Universal House of Justice. Their specific implementation will form a large part of the next Plan which will follow immediately on the completion of the present one and will be of six years' duration. By winning the Seven Year Plan, by consolidating our local communities, and above all by strengthening and deepening our understanding of the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation we shall be preparing ourselves to play our part in bringing about that transformation of human life on this planet which must take place ere it becomes fit to receive the bounties and blessings of God's own Kingdom.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1986

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1986

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The Divine Springtime is fast advancing and all the atoms of the earth are responding to the vibrating influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. The evidences of this new life are clearly apparent in the progress of the Cause of God. As we contemplate, however momentarily, the unfolding pattern of its growth, we can but recognize, with wonder and gratitude, the irresistible power of that Almighty Hand which guides its destinies.

This progress has accelerated notably during the Seven Year Plan, witnessed by the achievement of many important enterprises throughout the Bahá'í world and vital developments at the heart of the Cause itself. The restoration and opening to pilgrimage of the southern wing of the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá; the completion and occupation of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice; the approval of detailed plans for the remaining edifices around the arc; the expansion of the membership and responsibilities of the International Teaching Centre and the Continental Boards of Counsellors; the establishment of the offices of Social and Economic Development, and of Public Information; the dedication of the Mother Temple of the Pacific, and dramatic progress with the building of the Temple in India; the expansion of the teaching work throughout the world, resulting in the formation of twenty-three new National Spiritual Assemblies, nearly 8,000 new Local Spiritual Assemblies, the

opening of more than 16,000 new localities and representation within the Bahá'í community of 300 new tribes; the issuing of 2,196 new publications, 898 of which are editions of the Holy Text and the enrichment of Bahá'í literature by productions in 114 new languages; the initiation of 737 new social and economic development projects; the addition of three radio stations, with three more soon to be inaugurated—these stand out as conspicuous achievements in a Plan which will be remembered as having set the seal on the third epoch of the Formative Age.

The opening of that Plan coincided with the recrudescence of savage persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, a deliberate effort to eliminate the Cause of God from the land of its birth. The heroic steadfastness of the Persian friends has been the mainspring of tremendous international attention focussed on the Cause, eventually bringing it to the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and, together with world-wide publicity in all the media, accomplishing its emergence from the obscurity which characterized and sheltered the first period of its life. This dramatic process impelled the Universal House of Justice to address a Statement on Peace to the Peoples of the World and arrange for its delivery to Heads of State and the generality of the rulers.

Paralleling these outstanding events has been a remarkable unfoldment of organic growth in the maturity of the institutions of the Cause. The development of capacity and responsibility on their part and the devolution upon them of continually greater autonomy have been fostered by the encouragement of ever closer co-operation between the twin arms of the Administrative Order. This process now takes a large stride forward as the National Spiritual Assemblies and Counsellors consult together to formulate, for the first time, the national goals of an international teaching plan. Together they must carry them out; together they must implement the world objectives of the Six Year Plan as they apply in each country. This significant development is a befitting opening to the fourth epoch of the Formative Age and initiates a process which will undoubtedly characterize that epoch as national communities grow in strength and influence and are able to diffuse within their own countries the spirit of love and social unity which is the hallmark of the Cause of God.

The goals to be achieved at the World Centre include publication of a copiously annotated English translation of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” and related texts, education of the Bahá’í world in the law of the Huqúqu’lláh, pursuit of plans for the erection of the remaining buildings on the arc, and the broadening of the basis of the international relations of the Faith.

The major world objectives of the Plan have already been sent to National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Boards of Counsellors for their mutual consultation and implementation.

Dear friends, as the world passes through its darkest hour before the dawn, the Cause of God, shining ever more brightly, presses forward to that glorious break of day when the Divine Standard will be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1987

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1987

Dearly-loved Friends,

The launching of the Six Year Plan at Riḍván 1986 coincided with the opening of a new epoch—the fourth—in the organic unfoldment of the Formative Age of our Faith. The administrative institutions of this growing Cause of God had already begun to show signs of an increasing maturity, while at the same time emerging from the protective obscurity of their early days into the larger arena of public notice. These twin processes were signalized by a development of far-reaching consequence to the internal life of the Bahá'í community and by an outward activity of a magnitude unprecedented in its entire history.

The former was a devolution of responsibility whereby all national communities, through their National Spiritual Assemblies, in consultation with Counsellors, Local Spiritual Assemblies and the generality of believers, were requested to formulate, for the first time, their own objectives for achievement during the new Plan. This expectation of maturity challenging the national communities was matched by their formulation of national plans submitted to the World Centre for coordination into the world-embracing Six Year Plan.

The latter was a united uprising of the entire Bahá'í world community to distribute the statement, “The Promise of World Peace”, issued in October 1985, to the peoples of the world. Heads of State, large numbers of the members of national governments, diplomats, teachers, trade unionists, leaders of religion, eminent members of the judiciary, the police, legal, medical and other professions, members

of local authorities, clubs and associations, and thousands of individuals have been presented with the statement. It is estimated that more than a million copies, in some seventy languages, have so far been distributed. These two activities alone have heavily reinforced the growing strength and maturity of the Bahá'í world community and given it a more clearly defined and readily recognizable public image.

Other factors have contributed greatly to the rapid entrance of the Faith onto the world stage. Indeed it appears that every activity of the widespread Army of Life is now observed or commented upon by some section of the public, from the General Assembly of the United Nations to small and even remote local communities.

The steadfastness of the sorely-tried Persian believers continues to be the mainspring of this world-wide attention increasingly being focussed upon the Faith. While the brutal executions of heroic martyrs are now less frequent, the harassment and deprivations, vilification and plundering of the long-persecuted community continue—more than 200 are still in prison—giving the representatives of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations firm grounds for strong and persistent appeals, which have aroused the concern of the General Assembly itself, and resulted in representations to the Iranian Government on behalf of the defenceless Bahá'ís by the Commission on Human Rights, and by many powerful nations including the various governments constituting the European Community.

All this has kept our beloved Faith under international observation, an interest increased not only by the circulation of the Peace Statement but also by the rapidly expanding activities in the field of economic and social development, ranging from the inauguration and operation of radio stations—of which there are seven now broadcasting—to schools, literacy programmes, agricultural assistance and a host of small but valuable undertakings at village level in many parts of the world.

National Bahá'í communities have organized and successfully conducted inter-religious conferences, peace seminars, symposiums on racism and other subjects on which we have a specific contribution to make, often achieving widespread publicity and the interest of highly-placed leaders of society. Bahá'í youth, inspired and uplifted by the vision and idealism of "the new race of men" have, through their many gatherings, attracted large numbers of their compeers and galvanized their own members to direct their lives towards service in the many fields in which a rich harvest awaits the dedicated Bahá'í worker.

Added to this rapidly burgeoning association of our fellowmen with Bahá'í activities, has been one outstanding magnificent achievement, the completion and dedication of the wondrous Bahá'í Temple in New Delhi, which received, within the first thirty days of its dedication to the worship of God, more than 120,000 visitors. This symbol of purity, proclaiming the Oneness of God and His Messengers in that land of myriad diverse religious beliefs, befittingly marks the power and grandeur with which these portentous days in the life of God's Holy Cause have been endowed.

The stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God. The immediate and basic challenge is pursuit of the goals of the Six Year Plan, the preliminary stages of which have already been initiated. The all-important teaching work must be imaginatively, persistently and sacrificially continued, ensuring the enrolment of ever-larger numbers who will provide the energy, the resources and spiritual force to enable the beloved Cause to worthily play its part in the redemption of mankind. To reinforce this process the international goals of the Plan have been adopted, calling for the undertaking of many hundreds of inter-assembly assistance projects, the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire at Ridván 1987 and the establishment, in the course of the Plan, of new National Spiritual Assemblies, of which those of Angola, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Macau have already been approved. During the first year of the Six Year Plan 338 pioneers, guided by the needs set forth in previous plans, have already arisen and settled in 119 countries. A new appeal is now being prepared, details of which will be announced shortly. The promotion and facilitation of service projects for Bahá'í youth in

the emergent countries of the world are now called for. National Spiritual Assemblies are asked to arrange, in consultation with each other and with the assistance of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the best means of ensuring the effective service of those who respond. Preparations for the Holy Year 1992, when the 100th Anniversary of the Ascension of the Blessed Beauty and the inception of the Covenant will be commemorated, have already begun. It is fitting, then, that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, which links the past and the future with the progressive stages towards the fulfillment of God's ancient Promise, should be the major theme of the Six Year Plan. Concentration on this theme will enable us all to obtain a deeper appreciation of the meaning and purpose of His Revelation—"A Revelation," in the words of the Guardian, "hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfilment, unsurpassed alike in the duration of its Author's ministry and the fecundity and splendour of His mission . . ." The questions that such concentrated study should answer will undoubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, its origin and what should be our attitude towards it.

Ever present in our contemplation of these profound questions is the magnetic figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant, the Mystery of God, the perfect Exemplar, Whose unerring interpretation of the Holy Texts and luminous examples of their application to personal conduct shed light on a way of life we must strive diligently to follow. During the course of the Six Year Plan the 75th anniversary of His visit to the West will be observed with befitting celebrations and proclamation activities. Simultaneously, there will be observed the 50th anniversary of the first Seven Year Plan in the Americas, launched in 1937 at the instigation of Shoghi Effendi, and which, in setting in motion the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grand design for the spiritual conquest of the planet, marked the opening of the first epoch of the Divine Plan.

Great and wonderful tasks challenge us as never before. They demand equally great and wonderful sacrifice, dedication and single-

minded devotion from every one of us. At present, the Bahá'í International Fund is utterly inadequate to support the tremendous expansion now required in all the multitudinous activities of the Bahá'í world community. The record of the Seven Year Plan, just completed, stands witness to our ability to meet the growing demands of the Cause. The heroism of the beloved friends in Iran, the eager response of 3,694 dedicated pioneers to the call raised for this essential service, the unceasing activity of teachers, administrators, local communities and individual believers throughout the entire organism of the embryonic world order, have endowed this growing Army of Life with new strengths and capacities. As we stride forward into the future we may be fully assured of His ever present bounty and the final victory of our efforts to establish His Kingdom in this troubled world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1988

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1988

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

At this resplendent, festive season, we greet you all in a spirit of renewed hope.

A silver lining to the dark picture which has overshadowed most of this century now brightens the horizon. It is discernible in the new tendencies impelling the social processes at work throughout the world, in the evidences of an accelerated trend towards peace. In the Faith of God, it is the growing strength of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh as its banner rises to more stately heights. It is a strength that attracts. The media are giving increasing attention to the Bahá'í world community; authors are acknowledging its existence in a growing number of articles, books and reference works, one of the most highly respected of which recently listed the Faith as the most widely spread religion after Christianity. A remarkable display of interest in this community by governments, civil authorities, prominent personalities and humanitarian organizations is increasingly apparent. Not only are the community's laws and principles, organization and way of life being investigated, but its advice and active help are also being sought for the alleviation of social problems and the carrying out of humanitarian activities.

A thrilling consequence of these favourably conjoined developments is the emergence of a new paradigm of opportunity for further growth

and consolidation of our world-wide community. New prospects for teaching the Cause at all levels of society have unfolded. These are confirmed in the early results flowing from the new teaching initiatives being fostered in a number of places as more and more national communities witness the beginnings of that entry by troops promised by the beloved Master and which Shoghi Effendi said would lead on to mass conversion. The immediate possibilities presented by this providential situation compel us to expect that an expansion of the Community of the Most Great Name, such as has not yet been experienced, is, indeed, at hand.

The spark which ignited the mounting interest in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was the heroic fortitude and patience of the beloved friends in Iran, which moved the Bahá'í world community to conduct a persistent, carefully orchestrated programme of appeal to the conscience of the world. This vast undertaking, involving the entire community acting unitedly through its Administrative Order, was accompanied by equally vigorous and visible activities of that community in other spheres which have been detailed separately. Nonetheless, we are impelled to mention that an important outcome of this extensive exertion is our recognition of a new stage in the external affairs of the Cause, characterized by a marked maturation of National Spiritual Assemblies in their growing relations with governmental and non-governmental organizations and with the public in general.

This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of national Bahá'í external affairs representatives from Europe and North America, together with senior representatives of the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community, intent on effecting greater coordination of their work. This was a preliminary step towards the gathering of more and more National Spiritual Assemblies into a harmoniously functioning, international network capable of executing global undertakings in this rapidly expanding field. Related to these developments was the significant achievement of international recognition accorded the Faith through its formal acceptance last October into membership of the Network on Conservation and Religion of the renowned World Wide Fund for Nature.

At one of the darkest periods in the prolonged oppression of the dearly-loved, resolutely steadfast friends in Iran, Shoghi Effendi was moved to comfort them in a letter of astounding insight. “It is the shedding of the sacred blood of the martyrs in Persia” he wrote, “which, in this shining era, this resplendent, this gem-studded Bahá’í age, shall change the face of the earth into high heaven and, as revealed in the Tablets, raise up the tabernacle of the oneness of mankind in the very heart of the world, reveal to men’s eyes the reality of the unity of the human race, establish the Most Great Peace, make of this lower realm a mirror for the Abhá Paradise, and establish beyond any doubt before all the peoples of the world the truth of the verse: ‘ . . . the day when the Earth shall be changed into another Earth.’ ” Reflections like these, in adducing such wondrous future consequences from the horrific suffering to which our Iranian friends are subjected, illuminate the opportunity and the challenge facing us all at this crucial moment in the fortunes of the Cause.

The great projects already launched must be pursued to their completion. The Terraces below and above the Shrine of the Báb and the Arc on Mount Carmel must be completed, fulfilling the glorious vision of the efflorescence of God’s holy mountain; the second World Congress must be held in the City of the Covenant to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the inauguration of that Covenant; the steadily advancing work on the translation and annotation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, must be brought to publication; the interest shown by the friends in the Law of Huqúqu’lláh must be cultivated; the pioneers and travelling teachers must go forth; the expenses of the Cause must be met; all objectives of the Six Year Plan must be achieved.

But the paramount purpose of all Bahá’í activity is teaching. All that has been done or will be done revolve around this central activity, the “head corner-stone of the foundation itself”, to which all progress in the Cause is due. The present challenge calls for teaching on a scale and of a quality, a variety, and intensity outstripping all current efforts. The time is now, lest opportunity be lost in the swiftly changing moods of a frenetic world. Let it not be imagined that expedience is the essential motive arousing this sense of urgency. There is an overarching reason: it is the pitiful plight of masses of

humanity, suffering and in turmoil, hungering after righteousness, but “bereft of discernment to see God with their own eyes, or hear His Melody with their own ears”. They must be fed. Vision must be restored where hope is lost, confidence built where doubt and confusion are rife. In these and other respects, “The Promise of World Peace” is designed to open the way. Its delivery to national governmental leaders having been virtually completed, its contents must now be conveyed, by all possible means, to peoples everywhere from all walks of life. This is a necessary part of the teaching work in our time and must be pursued with unabated vigour.

Teaching is the food of the spirit; it brings life to unawakened souls and raises the new heaven and the new earth; it uplifts the banner of a unified world; it ensures the victory of the Covenant and brings those who give their lives to it the supernal happiness of attainment to the good pleasure of their Lord.

Every individual believer—man, woman, youth and child—is summoned to this field of action; for it is on the initiative, the resolute will of the individual to teach and to serve, that the success of the entire community depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, sustained by daily prayer and reading of the Holy Word, strengthened by a continual striving to obtain a deeper understanding of the divine Teachings, illumined by a constant endeavour to relate these Teachings to current issues, nourished by observance of the laws and principles of His wondrous World Order, every individual can attain increasing measures of success in teaching. In sum, the ultimate triumph of the Cause is assured by that “one thing and only one thing” so poignantly emphasized by Shoghi Effendi, namely, “the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh”.

Beloved Friends—you who are addressed by the Best Beloved, the Blessed Beauty, as “the solace of the eye of creation”, as “the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men”—we urge you, with all earnestness from the utter depths of our conviction as to the ripeness of the time, to lay aside your every minor concern

and direct your energies to teaching His Cause to—proclaiming, expanding and consolidating it. You can approach your task in full confidence that this clear field of progress outstretched before you derives from the operation of that “God-born Force” which “vibrates within the innermost being of all created things” and which, “acting even as a two-edged sword, is, under our very eyes, sundering, on the one hand, the age-old ties which for centuries have held together the fabric of civilized society, and is unloosing, on the other, the bonds that still fetter the infant and as yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá’u’lláh”.

Have no fear or doubts. The power of the Covenant will assist you and invigorate you and remove every obstacle from your path. “He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him”.

You have our abiding assurance of ardent and constant prayers for you all.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1989

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1989

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The spiritual current which exerted such galvanic effects at the International Bahá'í Convention last Riḍván has swept through the entire world community, arousing its members in both the East and the West to feats of activity and achievement in teaching never before experienced in any one year.

The high level of enrollments alone bears this out, as nearly half a million new believers have already been reported. The names of such far-flung places as India and Liberia, Bolivia and Bangladesh, Taiwan and Peru, the Philippines and Haiti leap to the fore as we contemplate the accumulating evidences of the entry by troops called for in our message of a year ago. These evidences are hopeful signs of the greater acceleration yet to come and in which all national communities, whatever the current status of their teaching effort, will ultimately be involved.

We look back with feelings of humble gratitude and heightened expectations at the stupendous developments which have taken place in so brief a period.

One such development has been the adoption of the architectural design conceived by Mr. Fariburz Sahba for the Terraces of the

Shrine of the Báb, which launches a new stage towards the realization of the Master's and the Guardian's vision for the path along which the kings and rulers will ascend the slopes of Mount Carmel to pay homage at the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh's Martyr-Herald. Other developments include: the approval by the central authorities in Moscow of the application submitted by a number of Bahá'ís in Ishqábád to restore the Local Spiritual Assembly of that city; the initiation of steps to open a Bahá'í Information Centre in Budapest, the first such agency of the Faith in the Eastern Bloc; the establishment of a branch of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information in Hong Kong in anticipation of the time when the Faith can be proclaimed on the mainland of China.

Also outstanding among these developments have been the successful co-sponsorship by the Bahá'í International Community of the "Arts for Nature" programme in London held to benefit the work of the World Wide Fund for Nature; the signing of an agreement in Geneva establishing formal working relations between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Bahá'í International Community; the official approval of a Bahá'í curriculum for public schools in New South Wales, Australia; the immense stream of visitors to the Temple in New Delhi, swelling to some four million since that edifice's inauguration in December 1986, and including an unusual number of high government officials and other prominent persons from many lands, among them China, the Soviet Union and countries of the Eastern Bloc. These, added to numerous other highlights of this single year, merge with the overall record of accomplishments thus far in the Six Year Plan, presenting a dynamic picture of accelerated activity throughout the Bahá'í world.

No reference to such marvelous progress could fail to acknowledge the spiritual and social impact effected by the decade-long episode of persecution inflicted with such cruel excesses on our Iranian fellow-believers. Only in the future will the full consequence of their sacrifice be known, but we can clearly recognize its influence on the extraordinary success in proclaiming the Faith and in establishing good relations with governmental authorities and major non-governmental organizations around the world. It is therefore with profound thanksgiving and joy that we announce the release of the

vast majority of Bahá'í prisoners in Iran. Even as we rejoice we cannot forget that there remain to be realized the full emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'í community and the assurance of the human rights of its members in all respects.

In the gladness of the moment, we extend a warm welcome to the two National Spiritual Assemblies being formed this Ridván: one in Macau in Southeast Asia, the other in Guinea-Bissau in West Africa.

Through the shadow of confusion deranging present-day society, there is a far glimmer, yet so faint but discernible, of an approach, slow but definite, towards the culmination of the three collateral processes envisaged by the beloved Guardian, namely: the emergence of the Lesser Peace, the construction of the buildings on the Arc on Mount Carmel and the evolution of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Indeed, throughout the Six Year Plan, during this fourth epoch of the Formative Age, and particularly during the year just ended, this glimmer, still so distant, has drawn closer. For who could have imagined, even at the beginning of this Plan, the sudden changes of attitude moving political leaders in some of the most troubled spots on the planet to break away from seemingly intractable positions—changes which in recent months have prompted editorial writers to ask: “Is peace breaking out?” To any observer conscious of the divine Source of such occurrences, this development must certainly be encouraging, although the precise circumstances attending the establishment of the Lesser Peace are not known to us; even its exact timing is concealed in the Major Plan of God.

The two other processes, however, are directly influenced by the degree to which the followers of Bahá'u'lláh fulfill their clearly delineated tasks.

There is good reason to take heart. For have not the architectural concepts for the remaining buildings on the Arc been adopted and the detailed specifications which will effect their realization as splendid monumental structures been undertaken? Have we not witnessed the increasing strength of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in

their ability to conceive and execute plans, in their capacity to deal with governmental authorities and social organizations, to respond to public calls upon their services and to collaborate with others in projects of social and economic development? Are these Assemblies not reinforced by the alert, loving support of the Continental Counsellors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, all of whose burgeoning energies are being skillfully coordinated by the International Teaching Centre—an institution whose augmented membership has already displayed a verve, a vision and a versatility evocative of warm admiration?

Tempting as it may be to dwell upon the positive features of our progress, better that we should be spurred on by them than that we should rest on our achievements. Let us continue, therefore, undeflected and confident, to seize the magnificent possibilities which the mix and blend of these ongoing processes and events allow for actualizing the immediate interests of our sacred Cause. These interests, to be sure, are identified in the major objectives of the Six Year Plan, on the second half of which we are now embarked, fully conscious of the not-too-distant approach of the Holy Year, 1992-1993, and its significant commemorations.

In conjunction with the ever-widening thrust of teaching, we must proceed by every possible means with projects of the most critical importance. Work is continuing on the preparation for publication in English of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation. Arrangements must now be made for a befitting commemoration in the Holy Land of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. The plans for the World Congress in 1992 in New York must continue to advance on schedule. Moreover, further systematic attention needs to be given to the eventual elimination of illiteracy from the Bahá'í community, an accomplishment which would, beyond anything else, make the Holy Word accessible to all the friends and thus reinforce their efforts to live the Bahá'í life. Similarly, assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Bahá'í activities.

Regarding the projects on Mount Carmel, the Office of the Project Manager has been established, and a technical staff is being assembled. Geological testing at the sites of the designated buildings on the Arc is about to begin—a step preliminary to the ground breaking anticipated by the entire Bahá'í world. Hence, we seize this opportunity to apprise you of the urgency for the required funds both to initiate construction and to sustain this work once it has begun.

All these requirements must and will surely be met through reconsecrated service on the part of every conscientious member of the Community of Bahá, and particularly through personal commitment to the teaching work. So fundamentally important is this work to ensuring the foundation for success in all Bahá'í undertakings and to furthering the process of entry by troops that we are moved to add a word of emphasis for your consideration. It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá'í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá'í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained.

Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.

Beloved Friends: The momentum generated by this past year's achievements is reflected not only in the opportunities for marked expansion of the Cause but also in a broad range of challenges—momentous, insistent and varied which—have combined in ways that place demands beyond any previous measure upon our spiritual and material resources. We must be prepared to meet them. At this mid-point of the Six Year Plan, we have reached a historic moment pregnant with hopes and possibilities—a moment at which significant trends in the world are becoming more closely aligned with principles and objectives of the Cause of God. The urgency upon our community to press onward in fulfillment of its world-embracing mission is therefore tremendous.

Our primary response must be to teach—to teach ourselves and to teach others—at all levels of society, by all possible means, and without further delay. The beloved Master, in an exhortation on teaching, said it is “not until the candle is lit that it can shed the brightness of its flame; not until the light shineth forth that its brilliance can dispel the surrounding gloom”. Go forth, then, and be the “lighters of the unlit candles”.

Our abiding love, unabating encouragement, constant, fervent prayers accompany you wherever you may go, whatever you may do in service to our beloved Lord.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1990

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Having ended a year of momentous achievements, we stand at the threshold of the last decade of this radiant twentieth century facing an immediate future of immense challenges and dazzling prospects. The swiftness of events during the past year is indicative of the acceleration, as the hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension approaches, of the spiritual forces released with the advent of His revolutionizing mission. It is an acceleration which, in its suddenness and wide transformational impact on social thought and on political entities, has aroused feelings of delight as to its immediate effects and of bewilderment as to its real meaning and destined outcome, prompting the astonished editors of an outstanding newspaper, finding themselves bereft of explanations, to attribute it to the workings of an "Invisible Hand".

For the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world there can be no doubt as to the Divine Source and clear intention of these extraordinary happenings. Let us rejoice, therefore, in the wondrous signs of the beneficence of God's abounding grace. The high level of teaching and enrolments reported last Riḍván has been sustained, and new fields of teaching have been opened from Eastern Europe to the China Sea. With the settlement in recent weeks of two Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in Sakhalin Island, the last remaining territory named by Shoghi Effendi in his Ten Year Global Plan entered the Bahá'í fold.

The re-creation last Riḍván of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ishqábád, the recent election of that of Cluj in Romania, the first new Assembly in the “East Bloc”, the re-establishment and formation this Riḍván of Local Spiritual Assemblies in other parts of the Soviet Union and in other countries of Eastern Europe—all these achievements and immediate prospects affirm our arrival at a significant milestone in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. The Administrative Order now embraces a community of wider diversity than ever before. It is such prodigious developments that prompted our recent announcement of a subsidiary Two Year Teaching Plan, now formally launched, to which we commend your urgent and active attention. How staggering, how far-reaching have been the activities which propelled the community in one short year towards this stage in its evolution! As we reflect on the wonders of Bahá’u’lláh’s confirmations, our hearts turn with love and appreciation to the Hands of the Cause of God everywhere, who, as the standard-bearers of that community, have ever upheld its bright emblems against the darkness of the times. With an indomitable spirit they persevere in fulfilling, under all circumstances and wherever they may be, their God-given tasks to stimulate, edify, and advise its widely scattered, rapidly multiplying members. In the face of the new situation in the Bahá’í world, we take joy in mentioning some instances in the past year of association of Hands of the Cause with the developments in Europe and Asia. Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, in an extended journey to the Far East, represented the Universal House of Justice at the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Macau; spent time with the Knight of Bahá’u’lláh in Mongolia where subsequently the first native declared her belief in Bahá’u’lláh; and devoted much attention to the friends in different parts of the People’s Republic of China, where her film “The Green Light Expedition” has been shown on television. Mr. Collis Featherstone focused much energy on reinvigorating the long-suffering friends in war-ravaged Vietnam. At this very moment, Mr. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan is visiting the USSR, which he was forced to leave during the persecution of the Faith there; now he has returned in triumphant fulfilment of a wish expressed to him by our beloved Guardian some sixty years ago.

Nor have the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre been slow in responding to opportunities to foster the climate

of progress now evident in all quarters of the globe. Through the unified vision of growth to which they have called the Continental Boards of Counsellors and their able, hardworking and self-sacrificing auxiliaries, a new vitality can be felt in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world. The Continental Counsellors deserve the deep gratitude of the entire Bahá'í community as they approach the close of their current five-year term, distinguished for their outstanding services.

Just as the community has extended its ramifications internally, it has also expanded its relations, influence and appeal externally in a variety of ways, some astonishing in their breadth and potential. A few examples will suffice: Through the newly established Office of the Environment, the Bahá'í International Community, on its own initiative and in collaboration with other environmental organizations, re-instituted the annual World Forestry Charter Gathering founded in 1945 by the renowned Richard St. Barbe Baker; since then the Office of the Environment has been invited to participate in important events sponsored by international organizations concerned with environmental questions. The Bahá'í International Community has been involved in the work of the Task Force for Literacy under the aegis of UNESCO and was invited to participate in the World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand, where its representative was asked to assume a variety of highly visible and important tasks which gave prominence to the Bahá'í community. Steps were taken, with the encouragement of a Fijian senior Government official, to open in Suva a branch of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office for the Pacific region. The University of Maryland in the United States announced its decision to establish "The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace" in its Centre for International Development and Conflict Management, which will give rise to a great increase in academic efforts to examine the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. At almost the same time the National Spiritual Assembly of India announced that an agreement had been reached to establish a Chair for Bahá'í Studies at the University of Indore.

The continuing efforts to secure the emancipation of the Bahá'ís of Iran evolved to a new stage. For the first time, a United Nations

representative was able officially to meet on Iranian soil with a representative of the proscribed Bahá'í community. The result was recorded in a report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, at whose recent session in Geneva a resolution on Iran mentioning the Bahá'ís was again adopted. In a corollary action of far-reaching importance the United States House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'í community and outlining steps to be taken by the United States Government towards this end; a similar resolution is before the Senate.

In the Holy Land, preparations for the execution of the building projects on Mount Carmel received a definite boost. It is a cause of deep satisfaction that, on the eve of Naw-Rúz, the District Town Planning Commission, after delicate and complex negotiations, decided to approve the plan submitted by the Bahá'í World Centre. This paves the way for the ultimate issuance of building permits.

Beloved Friends: Merely two years separate us from the conclusion of the Six Year Plan and the beginning at Ridván 1992 of the Holy Year, that special time when we shall pause to appreciate the tumultuous record of events which will have brought us to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and to reflect with due solemnity upon the redemptive purpose of the life of the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet.

In anticipation of this high watermark in Bahá'í history, plans have been set in motion for two major world events: One, the gathering in the Holy Land of a wide representation of believers from around the globe to participate in a befitting commemoration of that poignant consummation in the vicinity of the Most Holy Shrine. A component of this commemoration, symbolic of the transcendent and victorious influence of Bahá'u'lláh's liberated Spirit, will be the depositing beneath the floor at the entrance door of His Shrine of a receptacle containing the illuminated Roll of Honour of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, a listing initiated by Shoghi Effendi during his Ten Year Plan of those intrepid souls who arose to conquer in the Name of their Lord virgin territories mentioned in that Plan. This will have brought

to a fitting conclusion, after nearly four decades, an intention expressed by the beloved Guardian himself. The living Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will be invited to witness this occurrence.

The other event will be the Bahá'í World Congress to celebrate the centennial of the inauguration of the Covenant bequeathed to posterity by Bahá'u'lláh as the sure means of safeguarding the unity and integrity of His world-embracing Order. It is to be convened in November 1992 in New York, the place designated as the City of the Covenant by Him Who is its appointed Centre and Who anticipated that "New York will become a blessed spot from which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testament of God will go forth to every part of the world.

Related events at the local and national levels will combine with these two primary occasions to give vent to the innermost sentiments of the Bahá'ís and to impress on the public the profound fact of the appearance in the world of the Lord of the Covenant and the aims and achievements of His sublime mission. Indeed, plans are in progress to mount an intensive campaign to emblazon His Name across the globe.

The friends everywhere must now orient themselves to the significances of these twin anniversaries. They must be spiritually prepared through prayer and study of the Teachings to obtain a deeper appreciation of the station and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh and of the basic meaning of His mighty Covenant. Such preparation is at the very core of their striving to effect a transformation in their individual and collective lives. Let all the friends—every man, woman and youth—demonstrate through the high quality of their inner life and private character, the unified spirit of their association one with another, the rectitude of their conduct in relation to all, and the excellence of their achievements, that they belong to a truly enlightened and exemplary community; that their Best Beloved, whose Ascension they will commemorate, had not suffered His life on earth in vain. Let these requisites be the standard of their efforts to teach His Cause, the hallmark of their homage to the King of Kings.

Our dear and valued Co-workers: It is at such a time of profound anticipation for us that world society finds itself in a critical phase of its transition to the character envisioned for it by the Lord of the Age. The winds of God rage on, upsetting old systems, adding impetus to the deep yearning for a new order in human affairs, and opening the way for the hoisting of the banner of Bahá'u'lláh in lands from which it has hitherto been barred. The rapidity of the changes being wrought stirs up the expectations which inspire our dreams in the closing decade of the twentieth century. The situation is equally a bright portent and a weighty challenge.

It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day society which attainment to the Lesser Peace implies. Hopeful as are the signs, we cannot forget that the dark passage of the Age of Transition has not been fully traversed; it is as yet long, slippery and tortuous. For godlessness is rife, materialism rampant. Nationalism and racism still work their treachery in men's hearts, and humanity remains blind to the spiritual foundations of the solution to its economic woes. For the Bahá'í community the situation is a particular challenge, because time is running out and we have serious commitments to keep. The most immediate of these are: One, to teach the Cause of God and build its divinely ordained institutions throughout the world with wisdom, courage and urgency; and two, to complete on Mount Carmel the construction of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the remaining buildings on the Arc of the World Administrative Centre of the Faith. The one calls for resolute, sustained and confident action on the part of the individual believer. The other requires a liberal outpouring of funds. Both are intimately related. Over the last two years, almost one million souls entered the Cause. The increasing instances of entry by troops in different places contributed to that growth, drawing attention to Shoghi Effendi's vision which shapes our perception of glorious future possibilities in the teaching field. For he has asserted that the process of "entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world . . . will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical

strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh". We have every encouragement to believe that large-scale enrolments will expand, involving village after village, town after town, from one country to another. However, it is not for us to wait passively for the ultimate fulfilment of Shoghi Effendi's vision. We few, placing our whole trust in the providence of God and regarding as a divine privilege the challenges which face us, must proceed to victory with the plans in hand.

An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our aforementioned commitments.

Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.

The Order brought by Bahá'u'lláh is intended to guide the progress and resolve the problems of society. Our numbers are as yet too small to effect an adequate demonstration of the potentialities inherent in the administrative system we are building, and the efficacy of this system will not be fully appreciated without a vast expansion of our membership. With the prevailing situation in the world the necessity to effect such a demonstration becomes more compelling. It is all too obvious that even those who rail against the defects of the old order, and would even tear it down, are themselves bereft of any viable alternative to put in its place. Since the Administrative Order is

designed to be a pattern for future society, the visibility of such a pattern will be a signal of hope to those who despair.

Thus far, we have achieved a marvellous diversity in the large numbers of ethnic groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to fortify it through larger enrolments from among groups already represented and the attraction of members from groups not yet reached. However, there is another category of diversity which must be built up and without which the Cause will not be able adequately to meet the challenges being thrust upon it. Its membership, regardless of ethnic variety, needs now to embrace increasing numbers of people of capacity, including persons of accomplishment and prominence in the various fields of human endeavour. Enrolling significant numbers of such persons is an indispensable aspect of teaching the masses, an aspect which cannot any longer be neglected and which must be consciously and deliberately incorporated into our teaching work, so as to broaden its base and accelerate the process of entry by troops. So important and timely is the need for action on this matter that we are impelled to call upon Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies to devote serious attention to it in their consultations and plans.

The affairs of mankind have reached a stage at which increasing calls will be made upon our community to assist, through advice and practical measures, in solving critical social problems. It is a service that we will gladly render, but this means that our Local and National Spiritual Assemblies must adhere more scrupulously to principle. With increasing public attention being focused on the Cause of God, it becomes imperative for Bahá'í institutions to improve their performance, through a closer identification with the fundamental verities of the Faith, through greater conformity to the spirit and form of Bahá'í administration and through a keener reliance on the beneficial effects of proper consultation, so that the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will offer hope to the disillusioned members of society.

That there are indications that the Lesser Peace cannot be too far distant, that the local and national institutions of the Administrative

Order are growing steadily in experience and influence, that the plans for the construction of the remaining administrative edifices on the Arc are in an advanced stage—that these hopeful conditions make more discernible the shaping of the dynamic synchronization envisaged by Shoghi Effendi, no honest observer can deny.

As a community clearly in the vanguard of the constructive forces at work on the planet, and as one which has access to proven knowledge, let us be about our Father's business. He will, from His glorious retreats on high, release liberal effusions of His grace upon our humble efforts, astonishing us with the incalculable victories of His conquering power. It is for the unceasing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1991

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1991

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

No earthly tongue can voice the gratitude we feel for the extraordinary bestowals vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty to His world-wide community and to the World Centre of His Faith during the year just ended. We bow our heads in humility before the striking evidences of His sustaining grace and all-compelling might.

The overwhelming danger which, as a result of the turmoil in the Middle East, enveloped the Holy Land during the latter part of the year receded without halting or even seriously hampering the operation of the Bahá'í administration.

The situation was a poignant reminder of the contrast between the unobtrusive, steadily developing, distinctly integrative System of Bahá'u'lláh and the turbulent character of the Age of Transition, “whose tribulations”, Shoghi Effendi avers, “are the precursors of that Era of blissful felicity which is to incarnate God’s ultimate purpose for all mankind”. It was another of the “ominous signs simultaneously proclaiming the agonies of a disintegrating civilization and the birth pangs of that World Order—that Ark of human salvation—that must needs arise upon its ruins”.

The forces which united the remedial reactions of so many nations to the sudden crisis in this region demonstrated beyond any doubt the necessity of the principle of collective security prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago as a means of resolving conflict. While the international arrangement envisioned by Him for the full application of this principle is far from having been adopted by the rulers of mankind, a long step towards the behaviour outlined for the nations by the Lord of the Age has thus been taken. How illuminating are Bahá'u'lláh's words foreshadowing the future reorientation of the nations: "Be united, O concourse of the sovereigns of the world," He wrote, "for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."

Indeed, from whatever direction we gaze, the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is visibly at work in the world. In the call for a new world order, which has issued like a refrain from the statements of political leaders and influential thinkers, even when they themselves were incapable of defining their own meaning, can be discerned the slow awakening of humanity to the principal purpose of His Revelation. That such a call should have come so insistently from the head of that republic which is destined, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, to be "the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement" and to "lead all nations spiritually", is an indication of the efficacy and the acceleration of two simultaneous processes, one operating outside and one inside the Cause, which Shoghi Effendi tells us are destined to culminate "in a single glorious consummation".

Within the Cause, the signs of overwhelming achievements for the Six Year Plan, though not necessarily as projected at the outset, are abundant.

Arresting examples are evident in the wake of the phenomenal changes occurring in the Soviet Union and its former satellite countries. Just one year since the re-establishment of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Moscow, a National Spiritual Assembly of the Soviet Union is to be formed. Similarly, little more than a year since

the revolutionary political changes in Romania, the Government has recognized the Bahá'í community as a religious association with the right to spread the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh; here, too, a National Spiritual Assembly is to be formed this Ridván. Rapid expansion of the Faith in Czechoslovakia compelled the decision taken only in recent weeks also to establish a National Spiritual Assembly there. At the same time, in the Caribbean area, the National Spiritual Assembly of the West Leeward Islands will be formed as a result of the division of the Leeward Islands group into two regional administrative units. With these four very welcome formations, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies reaches 155.

We are happy to say that three Hands of the Cause of God will represent the Universal House of Justice at these historic events: Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in Romania, Mr. 'Alí Akbar Furútan in the Soviet Union, and Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá in Czechoslovakia. Counsellor Ruth Pringle will be the representative in the West Leeward Islands.

Another illustration of the rising authority of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the public mind emerges from Germany, where the Federal Constitutional Court, the highest legal authority in the land, rendered a decision of capital importance to the recognition of the Faith. A series of lower courts had refused to register the by-laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly on the grounds that the authority granted to the National Spiritual Assembly in that document violated the legal principle requiring the autonomy of all legally incorporated associations. The issues involved are indeed complex and cannot be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that the Federal Constitutional Court upheld the appeal of the Local Spiritual Assembly in a long, closely-reasoned decision in which, among other things, it affirmed the right of the Bahá'í community to gain legal capacity in the very shape ordained in the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith and stated that its nature as a recognized religion was unquestionably confirmed by its inherent character, by public knowledge, and by the testimony of scholars of comparative religion. So significant was the verdict in the Court's own estimation that it took the rare step of issuing a statement to the press explaining its decision. This outstanding act will have

implications for the Bahá'í community far beyond the borders of a united Germany.

Yet another instance of the growing public appreciation for the penetrating perspectives of the Cause involves the Republic of South Africa, where the National Spiritual Assembly, taking advantage of the initiatives of the Government towards resolving the decades-long problem of apartheid, decided to submit its views for the drafting of a new constitution for the country. The President of the South African Law Commission, the judge acting on behalf of the Government, who received the National Spiritual Assembly's submission from a delegation appointed by it, commented that the Bahá'ís were the only group thus far whose ideas had provided a spiritual and moral foundation for a constitution.

Whatever may be the individual effects of any one of these aforementioned developments—and of such others as the appearance of a representative of the Bahá'í International Community as the only non-Buddhist speaker invited to address a public meeting held in conjunction with the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace in Mongolia; the specific mention of the Bahá'ís by Pope John Paul II at a reception during his recent visit to Burundi; the official listing of the Bahá'í Faith as one of the common religions in Tuvalu; the International Exposition on Education for Peace sponsored by the Brazilian National Spiritual Assembly with the participation of 23 embassies and educational institutions one—thing is abundantly clear: the cumulative impact across the globe affirms the emergence of the Faith from obscurity. Such marks of increasing public recognition of the true character and rich potentialities of the Bahá'í community are a distinctive feature of the advancement of the Faith in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age.

In contemplating these marvellous signs and portents, we cannot resist the impulse to express our profound love and appreciation to the Continental Counsellors, and to their Auxiliary Boards, who stimulate and buttress efforts which make possible the accomplishment of such stupendous developments as have already been cited and whose ministrations, more especially, spur the

dynamic thrust of the teaching work, which is fundamental to all of the community's successes. We are delighted and encouraged beyond measure by the vigorous beginning which the Boards of Counsellors have made as they entered the new term of their indispensable and highly appreciated services to the Bahá'í world.

The fresh initiatives to which, with the whole-hearted encouragement and splendid support of the International Teaching Centre, they now bend their energies augur well for a gratifying completion of the Six Year Plan. May their exertions be greatly bolstered by the increase, as of the Day of the Covenant this year, in the number of Auxiliary Board members to 846—90 more than exist at present. The world-wide community will certainly welcome the strength which this action will bring to the scope and quality of the spiritual duties assigned to the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, whose operation at the grass roots is a guarantee of the continued expansion and consolidation of our glorious Faith.

The magnificent progress of the Six Year Plan brightens our spirits and exalts our hopes. All but one of the years of that Plan have passed and a mighty advance toward achieving its seven major objectives has been made. Our community has changed dramatically from what it was at the Plan's beginning in 1986. It has greatly expanded and developed. It is more diverse, more dynamic, more distinctive. As we enter the closing year of the Six Year Plan, a horizon of thrilling prospects stands before us all: The preparation of the long-expected, annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Book of Laws, the Most Holy Book, the Mother Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, will be completed—a monumental achievement which alone and of itself will usher in a new stage in the evolution of the Bahá'í world and thus crown the accomplishments of the Six Year Plan.

Earthwork on the lower Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and excavation for the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Annex to the International Archives Building will commence, initiating a new phase of these mighty and incalculably significant enterprises on God's Holy Mountain.

The Plan's end will mark the beginning of the Holy Year, 1992-1993, a conscious year-long pause to allow His followers to pay befitting regard to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and of the inauguration of His world-unifying Covenant. As has already been announced, major observances are being planned to reflect the distinctive character and world-shaking importance of the two occasions. The one: the gathering of representatives of the Bahá'í world, along with Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, at Bahjí in the precincts of the Mansion, from whence Bahá'u'lláh's liberated Spirit repaired to the throne of His heavenly sovereignty, and in the vicinity of the Most Holy Shrine, wherein the Roll of Honour of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will be deposited as a gesture indicative of the response of His lovers to His call to spread His teachings throughout the earth. There at Bahjí this gathering will engage in a solemn act of worship, the sacred readings for which will soon be shared with Bahá'í communities everywhere for use in their own commemorations, so as to unify the devotional experience of the entire Bahá'í world during this centennial observance.

The other: the World Congress scheduled to be held on 23-26 November 1992 in New York City, where the beloved Master revealed the implications of His station as the appointed Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and which He designated as the City of the Covenant. Throughout the world, Bahá'í communities will hold appropriate auxiliary events to magnify the Congress's purpose, which is to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and to proclaim its aims and unifying power. A corollary to these activities will be the wide distribution of a statement on Bahá'u'lláh, prepared at our request by the Office of Public Information, which will serve both as a source of study and inspiration for the Bahá'ís themselves and as an informative publication for presentation to the public. In these and other ways the community of the Greatest Name will endeavour to blazon the Name of Bahá'u'lláh across the globe, to make it a known eminence in the consciousness of peoples everywhere.

Such an exceptional confluence of imminent achievements—the publication of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the progress of the building projects on Mount Carmel, the conclusion of the Six Year Plan, the inception

of the Holy Year—animates the expectations of the Bahá'í world, sets the stage for mightier endeavours than have already been attempted, and points us all to the opening of a new phase of history. It seems fitting, then, that the sacred law which enables each one to express his or her personal sense of devotion to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good, which directly connects the individual believer with the Central Institution of the Faith, and which, above all, ensures to the obedient and the sincere the ineffable grace and abundant blessings of Providence, should, at this favourable juncture, be embraced by all who profess their belief in the Supreme Manifestation of God. With humility before our sovereign Lord, we now announce that as of Ridván 1992, the beginning of the Holy Year, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Right of God, will become universally applicable. All are lovingly called to observe it. Our very dear brothers and sisters: Witness how the Beloved One has answered our entreaties. See how He has enriched our lives with new brethren and new institutions in lands hitherto closed to His healing Word. Consider with what potency His divine prescriptions are being affirmed as guide-lines for the behaviour of nations large and small. Surely such abounding benedictions have imbued you with indomitable courage and with confidence to face a challenging but brilliant future. Indeed, you have embarked on this auspicious year poised for the ultimate triumph of the Six Year Plan.

May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1992

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Riḍván season, with its inherent splendours and its initiation of unusual, eventful days, our hearts throb in wonderment, we kneel in homage to the King of Glory by Whose grace we have arrived at an auspicious juncture in the history of His Cause.

From the peak of triumph of the Six Year Plan now ended, we come to the threshold of the Holy Year, now begun, awestruck at the very thought of the unique significances associated with the commemoration of that sanctified occasion one hundred years ago when Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of all ages, took His leave of this earthly life. The Sun of Truth, however, was to set only to shine everlastingly from the “Kingdom of fadeless glory”, thenceforward to shed the radiance of its regenerative power on the entire world. Gone from this plane was He Who is the Author of a Revelation of “inconceivable greatness” in which “all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation”; the Originator of a new Universal Cycle “that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years”; the Founder of a World Order, a “System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed”. Moreover, He was the Dawning Point of the Day of God, the “Day in which God’s most excellent favours have been poured out upon men”. Such are the superlative realities upon which our

contemplations are focused during this special anniversary occurring at this crucial moment in the affairs of humankind.

So imbued are we by the sacred remembrances evoked by this Holy Year, that we can do no less than invite you all to take pause to enter into this period of reflection, this time of reconsecration, this stage of preparation for tasks yet to be done, heights yet to be attained, splendours yet to be unveiled. For if we look back at one hundred years of an unexampled history of unremitting progress, we also look forward to many centuries of unfolding fulfilment of divine purpose—fulfilment, which as experience has shown, is incrementally realized through the systematic advances of Plans and the wondrous leaps and thrusts of epochs.

Indeed, the immediate portal to this propitious Holy Year is the vista of new horizons opened by the triumph of the Six Year Plan, which coincided with the initial phase of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith. Overall it is not so much a triumph in numerical achievements, though in many places and at particular moments the scope of expansion was extraordinary. It is a triumph that has been manifested in a new variety of victories, in new beginnings, fresh initiatives and mature institutional developments, such as to stamp the seal of success on the Plan's seven major objectives. Impossible as it is to enumerate in these few pages the results of the Plan, the main aspects of the developments in this remarkably dynamic period deserve, nonetheless, to be highlighted. The Bahá'í community changed markedly over the last six years. The major indicators are, no doubt, discernible to the friends everywhere and may be summed up thus:

One: The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is represented in every country on earth. The sudden change in the political climate, no doubt by intervention of God's Major Plan, opened vast regions to the penetration of the divine teachings, primarily in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. The opportunities created by this change made possible the settlement of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in the last virgin territories that remained from Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year World Crusade. They also impelled the launching at Ridván

1990 of the subsidiary Two Year Plan for those regions. This supplementary Plan was a spectacular success, not only in terms of expansion in the many countries involved, but also in the diversity of the strata represented by the new believers in these countries, in the volume and variety of Bahá'í literature published and in the array of Bahá'í institutions established during that short time. The Bahá'í world was highly stimulated by these developments, and a number of countries elsewhere recorded significant successes in the teaching work. Figures already available to the World Centre indicate that more than one and a half million souls entered the Cause during the Six Year Plan. Of particular interest was the three-year special teaching project in Guyana which resulted in an increase of the size of the Bahá'í community to some six percent of the country's population.

Two: The proclamation of the Faith throughout the world attained an entirely new stage. The campaign of proclamation launched in 1967 through the inspiration of the centennial anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Proclamation to the kings and rulers of mankind, and which gathered added momentum in 1979 with the surge of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í community, now covered a greatly expanded range with the distribution of "The Promise of World Peace". Kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers, legislators, jurists, academics, diverse institutions and organizations became aware of Bahá'u'lláh's Message. The creative energies by which communities everywhere were exercised in broadcasting the Cause became one of the driving forces of the Plan and in no small way stimulated the interest of organizations, leaders of thought and the media in the solutions which the Faith has to offer to a strangely disordered world. Inspired by the impact of the measures they adopted for proclamation of the Faith, and also by that of their continuing efforts to defend the sorely persecuted Iranian Bahá'í community, National and Local Spiritual Assemblies displayed and continue to display a striking audacity and originality in dealing with the public. This is evident in their innumerable contacts with officials at all levels of government, in their association with a widening spectrum of organizations, and in the increasing facility of their contacts with the media.

Three: The dedication in December 1986 of the Mother Temple of the Indian Subcontinent to public worship introduced a new force to the teaching and proclamation activities of the Faith. As an edifice of rare beauty and excellence, the “Lotus Temple” has won wide acclaim, while at the same time exerting an extraordinary appeal to great numbers of visitors. Its fame as an architectural wonder spread with speed as did its spiritual influence. It is no exaggeration to say that of all the Bahá’í Houses of Worship, this Temple is today the single most effective silent teacher of the Faith, annually attracting more visitors, at the average rate of 20,000 daily, than all the other Bahá’í Temples combined. Among its visitors from many lands are some of the most prominent persons in the world. A source of great interest to the media, the Temple has been featured in television programmes, even in Russia and China. The influence of its success in these respects has contributed immeasurably to the widespread public awareness of the Faith.

Four: The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in distinctive ways. In learned circles, in reference works and in the media, the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a “principal” or “major” world religion. Media coverage of the Faith’s activities has increased voluminously by the intensified efforts of the friends in proclamation activities, but more important is the fact that the media are showing an independent interest in the Bahá’í community and are initiating contacts with it in various parts of the world. The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá’í ideas in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá’ís to participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or with non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the realization that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that the Bahá’í community should take a more active part in public affairs. The notable success of the activities of the Bahá’í International Community’s Office of the Environment, established during the Plan, amply illustrates the nature of these developments. Furthermore, the formal relationship which the

Bahá'í International Community established with the Conservation and Religion Network of the World Wide Fund for Nature and with the World Conference on Religion and Peace, in conjunction with the numerous such relationships established by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in their respective jurisdictions, reflects a trend in the Faith's emergence as an entity to be reckoned with.

Altogether, the drive of the ramified proclamation campaign has produced a public resonance about the Faith, which can be said to be known to the most significant public institutions and prominent persons on earth.

Five: Bahá'í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy, the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from governments and international non-governmental organizations, as, for example, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, German and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international non-governmental agencies.

Six: Youth activities took on a special character shaped by the idea of a youth year of service. The involvement of the youth in the Six Year Plan as short-term pioneers, travelling teachers and projecteers had a profound effect on the teaching work overall and in bolstering the efforts at social and economic development attempted by growing numbers of national and local communities. They had much to do with the many victories in the former communist countries. Their work in social and economic development projects attracted, in some cases, the attention of governments and

development organizations. Creation of the European Bahá'í Youth Council galvanized the activities of the youth which powerfully reinforced the teaching thrust on that continent during the final years of the Plan. A significant feature of the youth's activities has been their involvement, as short-term volunteers from all parts of the planet, in the work of the World Centre where their services have been of inestimable value.

Seven: The advances in the consolidation of the Bahá'í administrative system are evident from the marked improvement in the internal development and collaborative efforts of its two arms. The cherished and intrepid Hands of the Cause of God, true to the allegiance they bear to their beloved Guardian, persevere in their unique services, astonishing the community with their resilient powers. The growth in confidence and strength of the Boards of Counsellors and their auxiliaries, backed by a reinforced and vigorous International Teaching Centre, assured to the Spiritual Assemblies, whom they are charged to stimulate and advise, a buttressing indispensable to the welfare of the entire system; while the extension of the span of activities of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, themselves charged with guiding the destinies of their communities, significantly broadened the base of that system. Collaterally, the work of these institutions has facilitated and boosted the evolution of the Administrative Order. Even more: they have demonstrated a creative energy that bodes well for their continued maturation.

Eight: The great building projects on the Mountain of God, anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Carmel, inaugurated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the construction of the Tomb of the Báb and carried forward in the plans of Shoghi Effendi, entered a new stage. Work commenced in May 1990 on reinforcing and extending the main terrace of the Shrine of the Báb as the initial step towards realizing the architectural concept for fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of the Terraces that will extend from the foot to the ridge of the mountain. By September of the next year, ground was broken for the construction of the Centre for the Study of the Texts and for the Extension to the International Archives Building, to be followed by the construction of other edifices on the Arc, namely: the buildings

for the International Teaching Centre and, in due course, the International Bahá'í Library.

All these developments have made it evident that the accumulated potential for further progress of the Bahá'í community is incalculable. The changed situation within and among nations and the many problems afflicting society amplify this potential. The impression produced by such change is of the near approach of the Lesser Peace. But there has been a simultaneous recrudescence of countervailing forces. With the fresh tide of political freedom resulting from the collapse of the strongholds of communism has come an explosion of nationalism. The concomitant rise of racism in many regions has become a matter of serious global concern. These are compounded by an upsurge in religious fundamentalism which is poisoning the wells of tolerance. Terrorism is rife. Widespread uncertainty about the condition of the economy indicates a deep disorder in the management of the material affairs of the planet, a condition which can only exacerbate the sense of frustration and futility affecting the political realm. The worsening state of the environment and of the health of huge populations is a source of alarm. And yet an element of this change is the amazing advances in communications technology making possible the rapid transmission of information and ideas from one part of the world to the other. It is against such “simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other”, that a myriad new opportunities for the next stage in the unfoldment of the beloved Master's Divine Plan present themselves.

The burgeoning influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation seemed, with the imminence of the Holy Year, to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structures of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. The call for unity, for a new world order, is audible from many directions. The change in world society is characterized by a phenomenal speed. A feature of this change is a suddenness, or precipitateness, which appears to be the consequence of some mysterious, rampant force. The positive aspects of this change reveal an unaccustomed openness to global concepts,

movement towards international and regional collaboration, an inclination of warring parties to opt for peaceful solutions, a search for spiritual values. Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.

The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of the utmost urgency, calls to mind the encouraging global vision of Shoghi Effendi for the prospects of the Administrative Order during the second century of the Bahá'í Era, whose midpoint we are rapidly approaching. In 1946, he wrote: "The second century is destined to witness a tremendous deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the world-wide development of that Order, as well as the first stirrings of that World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the precursor, the nucleus and pattern—an Order which, as it slowly crystallizes and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order."

Attention to the special occasions of the Holy Year will surely equip us to undertake the urgent tasks of the next stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan. This commemorative period provides a befitting demarcation between the glories and triumphs of the last one hundred years and the lustrous prizes yet to be garnered. At the outset, we welcome with joyous and grateful hearts the further expansion and consolidation of the Administrative Order which will accrue from the formation this Ridván of twelve National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies. How striking it is that the number of these Assemblies is the same as the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies which existed at the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade in 1953! This is gratifying evidence of the rapidity of the expansion of the Administrative Order in less than forty years. With these new Assemblies, and making allowance for the absorption of Sikkim into India and the disruption of the Bahá'í Administration by the unsettled situation in Liberia, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies

which will take part in the seventh International Bahá'í Convention next Ridván will reach 165.

We are pleased to announce that the following Hands of the Cause of God will attend, as our representatives, six of the founding Conventions. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum will attend the Conventions of Bulgaria and of Poland; Mr. 'Alí Akbar Furútan will attend those of the Baltic States and of Hungary; and Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá will attend those of Greenland and of the Ukraine, Bielarus and Moldova. At the remaining Conventions our representatives will be Counsellors: Mr. George Allen, the Congo Republic; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Central Asia; Mr. Rolf von Czékus, Angola; Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi, Niger; Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Albania; and Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí, Azerbaijan.

Only a few weeks from now, in the sacred precincts of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, a gathering of solemn purpose will take place to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Desire of the Nations. The scroll bearing the Roll of Honour of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will, on the previous morning, 28 May, have been deposited, as indicated by our beloved Guardian, at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Most Holy Shrine, there to remain a symbol of the historic victory that rewarded the unswerving determination of the lovers of the Blessed Beauty who, in response to the call of the mighty Ten Year Crusade, planted the banner of His Faith in virgin territories throughout the world.

Subsequently, in November, at the second Bahá'í World Congress, the hosts of Bahá will gather in New York in their thousands to register, in a highly symbolic gesture on behalf of their brethren throughout the world, their regard for the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh bequeathed, and to evoke the memory of Him Who was appointed its Centre and Who exalted that metropolis by bestowing upon it the designation "City of the Covenant". There they will also demonstrate the power of the unity that the Covenant is meant to ensure to all the peoples of the world. It will be a moment of capital importance to the Bahá'í community in the gaze of the world at large.

These two international events are pivotal to the gatherings of similar intent in which the friends in every corner of the world will take part. The spiritual character and dignified manner of their participation will surely draw down confirmations from on high and profoundly influence the constructive forces at work throughout the earth.

Another source of blessings to which we have long directed our hopes will also become manifest. Bahá'u'lláh has written: "While in prison We have revealed a Book which We have entitled 'The Most Holy Book'. We have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth." Hence, it is with full cognizance of its world-shaking significance that we inform you of the forthcoming publication during the course of this year of the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Charter of the future world civilization which Bahá'u'lláh revealed in the House of 'Údí Khammár in 'Akká some six score years ago.

And now, amid the eager anticipations occasioned by the two major commemorative events and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Law of Huqúqu'lláh takes effect as part of the constant practice of the members of our entire world community. May the promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.

A year charged with happenings of such sacred import is bound to yield consequences of unimaginable potency. The immediate outcome is, however, impossible to predict, nor can it be fruitfully speculated about. Rather should we direct our thoughts to the meaning of the solemn occasions which this year is set apart to memorialize. For the purpose of the Holy Year is not fulfilled by public memorials alone, befitting as they will be. Essential to its purpose is the opportunity it offers for inner reflection on the part of every Bahá'í individual. Indeed, this is a special time for a rendezvous of the soul with the Source of its light and guidance, a time to turn to Bahá'u'lláh, to seek to obtain a deeper appreciation of His purpose, to renew allegiance to Him. This is a time of retreat to

one's innermost being, to the dwelling-place of the Spirit of Bahá, that interior to which He summons us when He says: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." This is a time for recommitment to the Covenant, for rededication to duty, for revitalizing the energy for teaching, the "most meritorious of all deeds".

As the foremost aid to your reflections and actions, you will doubtless draw upon the insight and inspiration of such of His words as these: "I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way. "By My Life! Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me." "I have come in the shadows of the clouds of glory, and am invested by God with invincible sovereignty." "He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me." "Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee Know this, O servant." "The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness."

Whatever our private reflections or response to duty may lead us to do, of one thing we must be sure: that the Name of Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World becomes known throughout the earth among high and low alike. Considering that it is already a whole century since the Blessed Beauty ascended, and given the crushing weight of the ills burdening the peoples of the world, and seeing that a veritable cry of anguish is issuing more loudly from the hearts of those who long for some hope of relief, we, His avowed servants, can neither falter nor fail in this primary and urgent duty. For He, Bahá'u'lláh, is the Supreme Manifestation, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, the Fountainhead of Justice, the immortal Beloved; for, according to His own unerring proclamation, "He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the

world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven.” Let us bear His Name with dignity to those who must hear It, offer It as a treasure to those who must receive It, speak It with love to those who must embrace It.

How laudable it would be if, imbued by this desire to blazon abroad His Name, and as a demonstration of our special love for the Abhá Beauty, we could each of us mount a personal campaign of teaching, such that the collective force and results of it throughout the world would bring to a resounding conclusion the sacred exercises of this Holy Year and set the stage for the launching of the impending Three Year Plan at Ridván 1993!

Finally, it is highly fitting at this time to recall Bahá’u’lláh’s expression in the Most Holy Book of His will for us with regard to the nature of our reactions to His passing: “Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world,” He wrote, “when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.”

Beloved friends, we shall not forget to supplicate at the Holy Threshold that from His retreat of deathless splendour the Blessed Beauty may fill the souls of each and all of you with the revivifying breath of His celestial power.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1993

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 150

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We have come to the King of Festivals in the undiminished glow of the marvellous benedictions of the Holy Year through which we have just passed, confirmed, renewed and energized in our sacred pursuits. For it was a time when the Abhá Beauty shed upon His worldwide community the radiance of His grace in such effulgence as to invest with astonishing success the efforts of His followers to observe so significant a double anniversary as the centenary of His Ascension and of the inauguration of His Covenant. It was the memorial pause that yielded a proclamation of the Most Great Name that resounded throughout the earth as never before; but what was so clearly an external phenomenon was quite markedly a reflection of an inner attainment to a deeper understanding of our relation to Bahá'u'lláh than hitherto obtained. The greater appreciation in ourselves of the universality of the community, of its embodiment of the first and over-arching principle of His Faith, has left a new and compelling impression upon our hearts; the effects of that awareness were strikingly demonstrated at the commemoration in the Holy Land last May and more broadly at the World Congress last November, as if to confirm our assurance in these desperately troubled times that the world of humanity is moving inexorably towards its as-yet elusive destiny of unity and peace. Indeed, during the Holy Year, we were transported on the wings of the spirit to a summit from which we have seen the fast-approaching glory of the Lord's immemorial promise that all humankind will one day be united.

The thrilling details of the happenings throughout the year are too numerous to describe here, for the workings of the Holy Spirit were universally felt, imbuing the activities of the friends with a mysterious force. Let it suffice, then, to recall such highlights as the gathering last May of the largest number of Bahá'ís to participate in an event in the Holy Land; the circumambulation of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh by the representatives of virtually every nation; the presence of the majority of the living Knights of Bahá'u'lláh at the time of the depositing of the Roll of Honour at the entry door of the Most Holy Shrine; the unprecedented size of the World Congress and the vast variety of its participants, including a huge body of youth who engaged in their own auxiliary programme; the procession of the representatives of the races and nations of the world on that spectacular occasion; the satellite broadcast which linked the Congress and the World Centre with all the continents. These were of a rare category of experience, and they have immortalized the fame of the centennial commemorations. The innumerable, imaginative efforts undertaken by the friends around the world, from remote villages to great cities, in observance of these important anniversaries illustrated afresh the profound degree to which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has been consolidated, and they generated the teaching work in many areas, with unusual and surprising results. The unprecedented publicity accorded the purpose and activities of the Holy Year through the mass media in large and small countries, the notice given by legislative bodies and public officials to the centennial, the gestures of recognition and appreciation of the Faith by governmental agencies, the involvement of representatives of the Bahá'í International Community in major global events, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro last June, in connection with which a public monument bearing an inscription from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and a large imprint of the Greatest Name was dedicated—such developments gave clear indications that the profile of the community has been raised in the public eye.

Apart from all these outstanding events and developments, but of even greater magnitude because of its far-reaching implications for the whole human race, was the release at Naw-Rúz of the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book. We draw a stage closer, then, to a time envisaged by `Abdu'l-Bahá:

“When the laws of the Most Holy Book are enforced,” the Master said, “. . . universal peace will raise its tent in the centre of the earth, and the blessed Tree of Life will grow and spread to such an extent that it will overshadow the East and West.”

The centennial year was also a period in which the situation in the world at large became more confused and paradoxical: there were simultaneous signs of order and chaos, promise and frustration. Amid the convolutions of the current global state of affairs, but with such feelings of wonder and joy, courage and faith as the Holy Year has induced in our hearts, we, at this Ridván, in the one hundred and fiftieth year of our Faith, are embarked upon a Three Year Plan. Its brevity is compelled by the swiftly changing tides of the times. But the Plan’s primary purpose is indispensable to the future of the Cause and of humankind. It is the next stage in the unfoldment of the divine charter of teaching penned by the Centre of the Covenant. The Plan will be a measure of our determination to respond to the immense opportunities at this critical moment in the social evolution of the planet. Through resolute pursuit of its stated objectives and full realization of its goals, as suited to the circumstances of each national community, the way will be made clear for a fit projection of the role of the Faith in relation to the inevitable challenges facing all humanity towards the end of the fast-fleeting, fate-laden twentieth century.

A massive expansion of the Bahá’í community must be achieved far beyond all past records. The task of spreading the Message to the generality of mankind in villages, towns and cities must be rapidly extended. The need for this is critical, for without it the laboriously erected agencies of the Administrative Order will not be provided the scope to be able to develop and adequately demonstrate their inherent capacity to minister to the crying needs of humanity in its hour of deepening despair. In this regard the mutuality of teaching and administration must be fully understood and widely emphasized, for each reinforces the other. The problems of society which affect our community and those problems which naturally arise from within the community itself, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative, will be solved as our numbers and resources multiply, and as at all levels of the community the friends develop the ability,

willingness, courage and determination to obey the laws, apply the principles and administer the affairs of the Faith in accordance with divine precepts.

The new Plan revolves around a triple-theme: enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of local and national Bahá'í institutions. This is to lend focus to requisites of success as the Plan's manifold goals are pursued in these turbulent times.

Against the conspicuous signs of moral decadence which daily is corroding the foundations of civilized life, these graphic words of Bahá'u'lláh assume acute urgency: "The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?" Such words have particular implications for the actions of anyone who has recognized the Lord of the Age. A crucial consequence of this recognition is a belief that impels acceptance of His commandments. Depth of belief is assured by the inner transformation, that salutary acquisition of spiritual and moral character, which is the outcome of obedience to the divine laws and principles. Towards this end the release of the annotated Kitáb-i-Aqdas in English, and its anticipated early publication in other major languages, provide a mighty infusion of divine guidance for realizing the vitality of faith which is essential to the spiritual well-being and happiness of individuals and the strengthening of the fabric of the community. No less essential to nourishing this vitality is the cultivation of a sense of spirituality, that mystic feeling which unites the individual with God and is achieved through meditation and prayer. Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its

interests. Special efforts to attract people of capacity to the Faith will also go far towards providing the human resources so greatly needed at this time. Moreover, these endeavours will stimulate and strengthen the ability of Spiritual Assemblies to meet their weighty responsibilities.

The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behaviour and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. Of relevant importance, too, are their resolve to remove all traces of estrangement and sectarian tendencies from their midst, their ability to win the affection and support of the friends under their care and to involve as many individuals as possible in the work of the Cause. By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society.

As National Spiritual Assemblies, with the ready support of the Continental Counsellors, chart the course to be followed in this brief span, the World Centre will attend to coordinating widely diverse activities through- out the planet, giving further direction to the external affairs of the Faith as the Bahá'í International Community is drawn more deeply into dealing with world issues. It will do this while at the same time pursuing with deliberate speed the gigantic building projects on God's Holy Mountain, which constitute part of a process clearly perceived by Shoghi Effendi as synchronizing with two no less significant developments: the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions. By the end of the Plan all remaining construction phases of the Mount Carmel projects will have been set in motion; the structural framework of the International Teaching Centre, the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the International Archives Building will have been raised up; and seven terraces below the Shrine of the Báb will have been completed.

The dramatic expansion of the work of the Cause in recent years and the developments expected during this new Plan demand material resources which have not been adequate for some time, even though substantial increases have been made in the contributions to Bahá'í Funds. The economic crises so widely reported seem destined to grow even worse, but neither the economic nor other pressing problems confronting humanity will ultimately be resolved unless the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is given due regard by nations and peoples and unless it receives the adequate material support of its avowed adherents. May the friends everywhere consider, together with their Bahá'í institutions and individually, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting nations, what must now be done by each and all to meet this inescapable, sacred responsibility resting upon them.

Our appeal for immediate, redoubled and sustained action on all aspects of the Plan is addressed primarily to the individual believer of every locality, who possesses within himself or herself the measures of initiative that ensure the success of any global Bahá'í enterprise, and "on whom, in the last resort," as our beloved Guardian plainly stated, "depends the fate of the entire community". The goals of the Three Year Plan will not be easily won, but they must be magnificently achieved, whatever the sacrifice. There should therefore be no hesitation or delay on the part of individuals or Spiritual Assemblies in attending to them, lest the problems of mankind pile up unchecked, or the rise of internal crises slows us down. Let it ever be borne in mind that we earn our victories through test and trial; we turn crisis to the advantage of progress by seizing the opportunity it provides to demonstrate the viability and winning power of our principles. In the onward surge of the Cause of God, crisis and victory have always alternated and have ever proven to be the staple of progress. As we savour the triumphs of the Holy Year, let us not forget the reality of this recurrent experience. Let us also remember that our blessings are equal to our challenges, as repeatedly shown by our glorious history.

Beloved friends: Do not be dismayed or deterred. Take courage in the security of God's law and ordinances. These are the darkest hours

before the break of day. Peace, as promised, will come at night's end.
Press on to meet the dawn.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1994

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 151

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

One year of the Three Year Plan is now behind us, a year in which the turmoil of the world engendered in hearts and minds both hope and fear, both optimism and despair, both admiration of people's courage and shame at the cruelty to which mankind can sink. Amidst these trials, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh press forward, clear-visioned and confident, raising the structure of God's Kingdom, suffusing society with a new spirit, and demonstrating to all people the revitalizing effect of the divine Teachings.

At the World Centre, the 23rd of May saw the opening of a new five-year term of the membership of the International Teaching Centre. In our first joint meeting we applauded the many initiatives which it had pursued during the previous term and urged their further development. Prominent among these initiatives was the guidance given to the Continental Counsellors to promote consultation at local and national levels, among institutions and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth in the Bahá'í community. Another was the progressive clarifying of various approaches to the teaching work. As the year has proceeded, these actions have intensified the impetus being given to the development of the Faith and its institutions by the Counsellors, the Auxiliary

Board members and their assistants, reinforcing the insight and encouragement that they give to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and the individual believers.

The growing reputation of the Faith in the eyes of the world, and the attention that this is drawing to the World Centre, underscore the importance of completing the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the buildings for the World Administrative Centre of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Since the issuing of the special appeal to the Bahá'í world to raise seventy-four million dollars for this project during the course of the Three Year Plan, the response has been heartwarming, and it is our ardent hope that the continuation of this spirit of sacrifice will result in the speedy achievement of this goal and will ensure the uninterrupted progress of the work, drawing to God's Holy Mountain the admiring gaze of visitors and residents alike.

Study of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is illuminating the lives of the rank and file of the believers. Awareness of the importance of upholding the principles of the Faith and obeying its laws is rising. Universal application of the law of Huqúqu'lláh has aroused an enthusiastic response. The friends' consciousness of their individual obligation to teach the Faith is growing. As they discharge their spiritual responsibilities and learn greater dependence on the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, they find that their faith gains new vitality, and their hearts fresh confidence. These are all areas where the action of the individual need not wait for either urging or help. Alone, and aided solely by the power of the Almighty, each believer is challenged to develop these spiritual strengths which will contribute beyond measure to the evolution of the community.

The human resources of the Cause are being augmented in two ways. People of capacity are being moved to embrace the Faith, reinforcing the ranks of those who are already serving. The latter, for their part, have been enriching their experience and acquiring greater capabilities through a more profound study of the Teachings and through expressing them in action. Recognizing the need for a more systematic deepening of their understanding of the Teachings and their application to society, the friends have increased the use of

workshops and institutes, with notable success. In the year ahead these two complementary processes—attracting people of capacity and increasing our own abilities—must be further advanced, stimulating individual action and the harmonious development of a wide range of activities for the promotion of the Faith.

As the potentialities of the individual believers unfold, so the local and national Bahá'í institutions are gaining ability to foster the quality of the life of their communities and to conceive and implement imaginative programmes. In many areas Local Spiritual Assemblies have collaborated in teaching the Faith in a region. National Assemblies, likewise, have been evolving innovative projects to seize the opportunities presented by developments outside the Cause. Some examples of such activities, in very different fields, have been the Open Letter Project in Albania; the response to the extraordinary receptivity of the authorities and the general population in the Sakha and Buryat Republics in Siberia; and the agreement signed between the National Spiritual Assembly of the Marshall Islands and the local government of Majuro Atoll in response to the national authorities' request that the Bahá'ís assume responsibility for the operation of five state elementary schools.

The evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions has made possible an increased measure of decentralization in the administration of the work. For this beneficial process to expand, however, the crucial prerequisite in most countries is the speedy improvement of the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies. This calls for the close attention of every believer. These local Bahá'í institutions, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, constitute a reservoir of strength and guidance which will amplify the effectiveness of the work of the Cause as they mature.

We live in the midst of populations which are in desperate need of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. It is our duty to present it lucidly and convincingly to as many souls as possible. The darkness and suffering around us not only are the signs of a need, but also present us with an opportunity which we must not fail to use. Conveying the message is merely the first step. We must then ensure that it is

understood and applied, for, as we read in one of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian: “Until the public sees in the Bahá’í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers.” When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings, develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens to gradually produce a truly Bahá’í community, a light and haven for the bewildered.

After the glorious events of the Heroic Age of the Faith, entry by troops of the peoples of the world into the Cause of God first occurred in Africa during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, and then spread to other areas. Gradually, the Bahá’í communities of those regions are learning through experience and are evolving methods and programmes which aim to draw these large numbers of believers together in functioning communities and to establish strong bases for continuing growth. To assist them in their endeavours, to help the Bahá’ís in other countries to initiate and maintain this process, and to dispel the misconceptions which inevitably surround so challenging a concept, a compilation on “Promoting Entry by Troops” has been issued. Study and application of the principles and approaches described therein will undoubtedly assist every Bahá’í teacher and community, whether in an area where entry by troops has been a reality for many years, or in one where no sign of it has yet appeared. In respect to the latter, it will help to convince individual believers of the reality and validity of this process and will enable Bahá’í communities to prepare themselves spiritually and materially for this surge forward, to eagerly anticipate its occurrence, to take those steps which will foster its beginning, and to ensure the measures which will perpetuate its growth.

The notable rise in international collaboration during the past year, the settlement of pioneers, and the flow of travelling teachers have knit ever more closely the fabric of the Bahá’í community. Leading the way in such achievements, Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum undertook an arduous journey for the encouragement of the believers and the proclamation of the Faith, covering Russia and other lands which were formerly parts of the Soviet Union, from the Baltic States

in the west to Siberia in the east, from the Central Asian republics in the south to Saint Petersburg and Yakutsk in the north.

This Ridván seven inaugural National Conventions will be held. Our representatives at these historic events will be the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mongolia in Ulaan Baatar; the Hand of the Cause `Ali-Muhammad Varqá for the election of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Slovenia and Croatia in Ljubljana; Counsellor Lauretta King for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kazakhstan in Alma-Ata, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek; and Counsellor Shapoor Monadjem for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The present Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia, with its seat in Ashkhabad, will then become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Turkmenistan.

The end of the century is fast approaching. There is so little time and so much to do. We call upon every follower of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to consecrate the utmost endeavour to the two primary tasks of teaching the Faith to every thirsting soul, and of providing the material means for the completion of the monumental projects being pursued on Mount Carmel. Whatever the outward conditions of mankind in the year ahead, the Bahá'í community must gather strength, demonstrate more clearly the distinguishing character of its way of life, reach out with confidence to proclaim and teach its message, and draw down in ever-greater measure the confirming assistance of the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse. In every aspect of this work, it is the individual Bahá'í who holds the key to victory.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1995

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 152

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Season of seasons, we greet you with profound pleasure at the increased activity throughout the Bahá'í community during the year just passed and with ardent expectations as to what must and can be accomplished during the last third of the Three Year Plan. We feel both concern and hope in the face of the despair besetting leaders of nations and peoples in their search for solutions to pressing social problems. Indeed, such desperation is tantamount to a worldwide cry for the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, truly a challenge and a promise no conscientious Bahá'í institution or individual can ignore.

No occasion has more sharply conveyed this melancholy outlook than the recent World Summit for Social Development, the latest in a series of international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations. But however little may be the immediate influence of such events on the policies of governments, however much the vast majority of the world's population may disregard or be unaware of them, their successive occurrence indicates to any Bahá'í observer a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfilment of the will of Bahá'u'lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and decide on the outstanding issues confronting an increasingly global society.

Propitiously on that momentous occasion in Copenhagen, an impressive Bahá'í effort, involving some 250 friends from more than

40 countries, was mounted to acquaint the participants in the Summit and the related NGO Forum with the remedies prescribed by the Divine Physician. This effort was extended beyond the Summit and is even now continuing in many places throughout the world. We applaud with heartfelt gratitude the Bahá'í institutions, agencies and individuals who produced this spate of action before, during and after the Summit, for surely it evinced both the further advance of our world community in influencing the processes towards the Lesser Peace and a multiplication of opportunities for a wider diffusion of the reformatory Message of Bahá'u'lláh. At such world events take place with greater frequency and the Bahá'í community pursues its goals with increased intensity, we can see more clearly the drawing closer together of the parallel processes about which Shoghi Effendi wrote several decades ago: the one leading to the political union of nations, the other to the ultimate union of hearts in one common faith.

We make these observations against an encouraging background of development in the Bahá'í community during the second year of the Three Year Plan. Even more thrilling than the leap in external affairs activities at local and national levels are the evidences of a qualitative change in the response of believers everywhere to the call to teach. A deeper understanding of this inescapable, individual duty is implied by the rise in teaching activity, a heartening situation resulting from several stimulating factors which all together augur well for the long-awaited influx of troops of new believers. Among these factors are the attention being given to the compilation on entry by troops as it appears in an increasing number of languages, the influence of the movement of International and Continental Counsellors throughout the globe, the evolution in the functioning of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, the effects of the emphasis being placed on the education of children, and the vigour of the youth in initiating teaching projects and engaging in a range of other Bahá'í activities.

Conducive to this positive picture is the gathering strength of Spiritual Assemblies, which are called upon to cope with manifold challenges while endeavouring primarily to focus on the demands of the teaching work. We are especially mindful of the burdens borne by National Spiritual Assemblies as the communities within their jurisdictions grow more diverse in their composition and more

complex in their demands upon the guidance and assistance of these institutions.

The combined impression of the various stages of development at which the community has arrived suggests that strong effort is being devoted to the triple theme of the Plan, which calls for enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of local and national Bahá'í institutions. But as there is yet much to be done along these lines, a more striking response is required of individuals and institutions, if our community is to combat the ravages of a rampant moral decadence, to raise up a massive army of consecrated souls to meet the demands of teaching and of administering the affairs of the Faith, and to render our institutions fit for the tasks that a burst in the size of the community will surely impose upon them.

Fundamental to any effective response to the immediate challenges facing the community are these requisites which are especially addressed to the individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly: On the one hand is the initiative that it is the duty and privilege of the individual to take in teaching the Cause and in obtaining a deeper understanding of the purpose and requirements of the Faith. Parallel with the exercise of such initiative is the necessity of the individual's participation in collective endeavours, such as community functions and projects. On the other hand is the role of the Local Spiritual Assembly to welcome, encourage and accommodate the initiatives of the individual believers to the maximum extent possible; and there is, too, the responsibility of the Assembly to devise or promote plans that will employ the talents and abilities of the individual members of its community, and that will involve individuals in collective action, such as teaching and development projects, institutes, and other group activities. The effects of conscientious attempts at realizing these inseparable requisites will be to expand and consolidate the community and to foster a climate of unified action.

During the last year, there was a sharp increase in the visits to the World Centre of high-ranking government officials, other dignitaries

and media representatives, demonstrating the growing significance of the spiritual and administrative centre of the Faith in the eyes of the world. This appeared to underscore a trend towards a greater familiarity of the governments of the nations with the evolving centre of a World Faith. Viewing this trend from the Mountain of God, the site of the current construction projects, and considering it in conjunction with the developments taking place in local and national Bahá'í communities, we can appreciate more adequately the unfolding reality of the vision projected by Shoghi Effendi when he explained the implications of the raising up of buildings that will constitute the world administrative seat of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. "This vast and irresistible process", he said, "will synchronize with two no less significant developments ... the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions". It is a vision which, given the state of the world, compels the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects as scheduled.

These projects are advancing with remarkable speed, astonishing pilgrims, tourists and local residents by their magnitude and emerging magnificence. The construction work is occurring on all structures at once. Work on seven of the Terraces below and five above the Shrine of the Báb is in full force. More construction contracts were signed during this year than in any previous one, including the contract recently awarded to an Italian firm for the supply of the marble for the buildings on the Arc. Clearly, the work has gathered a momentum that can abide no delay. Hence, a matching momentum in the flow of contributions is imperative, if the remaining forty million dollars towards fulfilment of the Three Year Plan goal of seventy-four million dollars is to be provided by Ridván 1996.

The new year begins auspiciously with the formation this Ridván of five National Spiritual Assemblies. Our representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, Armenia and Georgia; the Hand of the Cause 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, Belarus and Sicily; Counsellor Hushang Ahdieh, Eritrea. Moreover, during this period the communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa and Transkei will merge under the jurisdiction of one National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa, so as to reflect the recent political reunion of that

region. As a result of the foregoing, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world will rise from 172 to 174.

Beloved co-workers: Beyond the need to win our goals, humanity's current plight summons us to redoubled action. The cloud of despair hanging over the fortunes of a deranged world is the very harbinger of the spring rain that can quench the spiritual and material thirst of every people. It has only to be seeded through constant and confident acts of teaching. The performance of such acts, though dependent for reinforcement on the functions of Bahá'í institutions, rests primarily and ultimately with Bahá'í individuals.

Let no excessive self-criticism or any feelings of inadequacy, inability or inexperience hinder you or cause you to be afraid. Bury your fears in the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh. Has He not asserted that upon anyone who mentions His Name will descend the "hosts of Divine inspiration" and that on such a one will also descend the "Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light"? Step forth, then, into the arena where all His loved ones are equally summoned, equally challenged and abundantly blessed. For to teach, Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms, is to do the "most meritorious of all deeds". And at this extraordinary moment in the history of the planet, nothing whatever is of more critical importance than inviting people of every sort and every gift to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts.

As we send you this message, clearly before us is a vision of untold victories waiting to be seized. We are certain you can realize a myriad of these in the remaining time of the Three Year Plan. Just such an accomplishment must earnestly be striven for, so as to set the stage for the next global enterprise to be launched at Ridván 1996. There shall be mobilized then a world-embracing campaign to ensure a befitting crescendo to the achievements of a century regarded by no less than 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself as a period that will have "left traces which shall last forever".

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996

To the Bahá'ís of the World.

Dearly loved Friends,

Our hearts overflowing with gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, we acknowledge the abundant manifestations of His grace during the Three Year Plan, which has run its course with the advent of this Ridván Festival. The animating spirit of the Holy Year, which lent impetus to the launching of the Plan at Ridván 1993, pervaded this period of concentrated endeavor, rendering our world community more consolidated, more resilient, more mature, and more confident than before. At the same time, the community's prestige attained new heights. While this Plan has not ended on a note of dramatic, numerical expansion, even though significant growth of membership occurred in various countries, it has nonetheless resulted in a qualitatively enriched community—one prepared to exploit the immediate prospects for the advancement of the Faith.

The magnificent progress of the projects on Mount Carmel is preeminent among the measurable achievements of this period. Indeed, despite numerous difficulties, the stage of accomplishment anticipated in our message announcing the Three Year Plan is entirely evident. All phases of construction have been initiated. The structural framework of the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the International Archives Building has been raised up and the

work on these buildings has advanced towards initiation of the exterior and interior finishing work. The erection of the permanent seat of the International Teaching Centre, the third structure currently being built on the Arc, is progressing rapidly. Seven terraces below the Shrine of the Báb are now completed, foreshowing the unfolding splendor from the foot to the ridge of God's Holy Mountain. A watchful public is awed at the tapestry of beauty spreading over the mountainside.

The physical reality of the progress thus far so marvelously realized is proof of an even more profound achievement, namely, the unity of purpose effected throughout our global community in the pursuit of this gigantic, collective enterprise. The intensity of the interest and support it has evoked has expressed itself in an unprecedented outpouring of contributions, reflecting a level of sacrifice that bespeaks the quality of faith and generosity of heart of Bahá'u'lláh's lovers throughout the planet. That contributions towards the Mount Carmel Projects have met the three-year goal of seventy-four million dollars marks yet another measurable and exceptional achievement, inspiring confidence that the necessary financial support for these projects will continue until their completion by the end of the century.

The signs of progress during the past three years were evident in a wide and varied field. The remarkable efforts to expand and consolidate the community, the increased ventures in social and economic development, and the unprecedented thrust of the external affairs work combine to portray a community endowed with new capacities.

In the arena of teaching, there was a general increase of activity as indicated by the formation of twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies during the course of the Plan and by the surge of pioneering and travel-teaching. Believers in many countries were galvanized by the fresh approach suggested in the pioneer call released during the Plan. The number of pioneers from and to various countries was high, and there was a veritable flood of traveling teachers operating both at home and abroad. Systematic approaches to collective teaching activities and well-focused long-term teaching

projects were fruitful and were more evident than ever before in a number of countries.

The energy and creativity attendant to the various developments in expansion and consolidation owed much to the spirit of enterprise shown by the International Teaching Centre. Its constant direction and encouragement of the Continental Boards of Counsellors; its recommendation of new methods for the deployment of pioneers, as endorsed by the Universal House of Justice in the pioneer call released in the early months of the Plan, and its regular assistance to the Continental Pioneer Committees placed in its charge; its unflagging attention to the educational needs of the community as expressed in its interactions with Counsellors concerning the inclusion in teaching projects of deepening programs for new believers, the devising of courses and workshops for training in different capacities, the training of children's teachers, and the multiplication of children's classes; its stimulation of efforts to establish training institutes in different parts of the world—all have produced resounding results. Major credit must also go to the Teaching Centre for the influence it exerted through the Counsellors on the adoption of core literature programs in an increasing number of countries. Through such programs a few titles essential to the propagation of the Faith and the deepening of the believers were selected, printed in large quantities and made available at reduced prices. The outstanding progress in the evolution of this vital institution operating at the World Centre was palpable in its preparation and conduct of the Counsellors' Conference last December which set the course for the work of these high-ranking officers of the Faith during the immediate years ahead.

A relevant development was the notable rise in the assumption of responsibility by indigenous believers for the teaching and consolidation work in their own countries. In greatly troubled areas, such as Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the friends claimed important victories, whether in pursuing teaching activities which resulted in numerically significant enrollments, or in establishing and reactivating Bahá'í Assemblies, or in initiating and sustaining development projects. In places with recently formed National Spiritual Assemblies, such as countries of the former Eastern Bloc,

the friends have shown an admirable capacity for administering the affairs of the Cause. A highlight of this period was the upsurge of vigor, courage and creativity in Bahá'í island communities throughout the world. The categories of activity were wide-ranging, involving the raising up of local teachers, the training and dispatch of scores of traveling teachers to neighboring islands, the inauguration of primary schools, the multiple occasions for proclamation of the Faith, the sponsorship of events attended by high-ranking officials and influential persons. The fact that in recent years a number of government leaders of island nations have visited the Bahá'í World Centre is indicative of the vitality of the activities of the believers in these small lands scattered throughout the seven seas. Taken together, all the foregoing examples of the attitudes and efforts of the friends in different settings demonstrate a heightened commitment to the teaching work and a growing maturity and resilience reflective of the depth of faith motivating Bahá'ís from diverse populations.

Consonant with these observations were the outstanding contributions of the youth to expansion and consolidation. Their activities took on added dimensions during the three-year period. Actuated by youth conferences and other gatherings attentive to their interests, youth throughout the world invested immense amounts of time, energy and zeal in the teaching work as traveling teachers within and outside their countries and as teams in collective teaching projects and, in so doing, they stimulated hundreds of new enrollments and the formation of many Local Spiritual Assemblies; involvement of youth in music and the arts as a means of proclaiming and teaching the Cause distinguished their exertions in many places; the spread of dance and drama workshops was particularly effective; participation of youth in external affairs opened new possibilities for the Faith in this field; commitment to a year of service was more widely demonstrated; at the same time there was a notable increase in the number of youth acquiring formal training and achieving academic, professional and vocational excellence—altogether an indication that the youth are doing more in direct service to the Faith while at the same time contributing to the general development of society.

Signs of the consolidation of the community were also discernible in the greater involvement of the friends in social and economic

development, particularly in the field of education. In one outstanding instance, a government asked the Bahá'ís to take responsibility for the management of seven public schools, and they did so with the backing of the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Centre. Worthy of note is that in Africa Bahá'í communities in exile because of political unrest in their home country continued to develop farming and other projects that went far towards ensuring self-sufficiency. Efforts at improving the status of women gathered momentum in a number of countries where, in addition to Bahá'í participation in projects sponsored by other organizations, the Bahá'í institutions set up committees and offices to attend to the interests of women. The Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women emerged as a symbol of this upswing.

In a number of countries, too, there was significant Bahá'í participation in government-sponsored programs to improve health; in other instances Bahá'í groups initiated such programs and carried them out. The work in social and economic development was also distinguished by the firm establishment and consolidation of a number of major projects and organizations. Three pilot literacy projects were begun as a first step in a literacy campaign which the Office of Social and Economic Development intends to extend throughout the world. The Bahá'í initiation and involvement in development projects also resulted in proclamation of the Faith as they attracted the participation of the public and the interest of mass media.

A thrust in the external affairs work exceeding all previous records for a similar period boosted the proclamation of the Cause. A prodigy of effort in all parts of the world redounded to a much greater visibility of the Faith than obtained before and to a consequent rise in the prestige of the Bahá'í international community. The broad lines of progress were evident in the ease with which Bahá'í communities, large and small, sponsored or participated in public events; in the emergence of the Bahá'ís as a force in society recognized by governmental and nongovernmental organizations and many prominent persons; in the ready accessibility of the media. Indeed, the wide coverage accorded Bahá'í events and interests by the print and electronic communications media was beyond calculation.

In the sweep of activities throughout the world, certain specific developments stood out: the frequency with which high public officials would invite Bahá'ís to participate in or assist with events or projects; the successful initiatives of Bahá'ís in influencing government action; the establishment of Bahá'í academic programs and courses in colleges and universities and the adoption of curricular material for public schools; the use of the arts by Bahá'í institutions, groups and individuals in proclamation events.

During 1995, two major United Nations events exemplified the gathering momentum of an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings, and these engaged the active attention and participation of the Bahá'í community. First, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen during March involved 250 friends from more than 40 countries who mounted an impressive effort to acquaint the summit participants and the related NGO Forum with the Teachings. It was on this occasion that the statement "The Prosperity of Humankind," produced by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, was first distributed and discussed. Follow-up activities all over the world included the holding of conferences and seminars, as well as the distribution of the statement. Second, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the concomitant NGO Forum held in Beijing during September drew the attendance of more than 500 Bahá'ís from around the world, in addition to the official delegation of the Bahá'í International Community. In that same year, a third event, the observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, prompted the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office to produce and distribute a statement, entitled "Turning Point for All Nations," containing proposals for the development of that world organization.

Also of particular note among the external affairs activities were two occasions involving the prominent participation of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Last spring she headed the delegation of the four official Bahá'í representatives to the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation, patronized by His Royal Highness Prince Philip and held at Windsor Castle. During October Rúhíyyih Khánum was the keynote speaker at the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to Global Society held under the auspices

of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and organized by the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace and the Department of History at the University of Maryland.

Nor can we neglect to mention certain other significant marks of the period under review. An edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in the original Arabic was published with, for the first time, notes in Persian, supplementing the text as in the English edition. The Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh became more deeply rooted in the hearts of the believers throughout the world, and during the final year of the Plan, the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, took up residence in the Holy Land. This significant step also means that all three Hands of the Cause of God—Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, and Dr. Varqá—are now residing at the World Centre, bringing inspiration to pilgrims and visitors, and to the friends serving at the World Centre.

It is against such a background of heartening developments that we embark at this Riḍván upon a Four Year Plan that will carry us to Riḍván 2000. We earnestly and lovingly call upon our brothers and sisters of every land to join us in a mobilization of effort that will ensure to generations of the fast-approaching twenty-first century an abundant and lasting legacy.

The Four Year Plan aims at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. As we have stated earlier, such an advance is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community.

The phrase “advance in the process of entry by troops” accommodates the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities allow for a sustained growth of the Bahá'í world community on a large scale; that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh—the individual, the

institutions, and the community—can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and development, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá'í Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.

Moreover, to advance the process implies that that process is already in progress and that local and national communities are at different stages of it. All communities are now tasked to take steps and sustain efforts to achieve a level of expansion and consolidation commensurate with their possibilities. The individual and the institutions, while operating in distinctive spheres, are summoned to arise to meet the requirements of this crucial time in the life of our community and in the fortunes of all humankind.

The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend. Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to "consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith."

To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading

and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. In addition to these, the individual, having been given the duty to teach the Cause, is endowed with the capacity to attract particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh. "Whoso openeth his lips in this Day," the Blessed Beauty asserts, "and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light."

Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative and action. He explained that without the support of the individual, "at once wholehearted, continuous and generous," every measure and plan of his National Spiritual Assembly is "foredoomed to failure," the purpose of the Master's Divine Plan is "impeded"; furthermore, the sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself "will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part." Hence, at the very crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action. Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the Guardian's advice: "Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyze their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts. Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master . . . Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust."

As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the

Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá'u'lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá'í community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Bahá'u'lláh's avowed supporters in all lands.

For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers' capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá'í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.

The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is a necessary development to which much attention is required both with respect to places where large-scale enrollment has occurred and in anticipation of more numerous instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families

and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unrelenting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá'ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, worldwide effort to develop human resources must be made. The endeavor of individuals to conduct study classes in their homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruction, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding community. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programs of training on a regular schedule.

Access of the institute to physical facilities will of course be necessary, but it may not require a building of its own.

This matter calls for an intensification of the collaboration between the Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies. For the success of these training institutes will depend in very large measure on the active involvement of the Continental Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members in their operation. Particularly will it be necessary for Auxiliary Board members to have a close working relationship with institutes and, of course, with the Local Spiritual Assemblies whose communities will benefit from institute programs. Since institutes are to be regarded as centres of learning, and since their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exercise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members, the intimate involvement in institute operations should now become a part of the evolving functions of these officers of the Faith. Drawing on the talents and abilities of increasing numbers of believers will also be crucial to the development and execution of institute programs.

As the term “institute” has assumed various uses in the Bahá’í community, a word of clarification is needed. The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centres of Bahá’í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.

“Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá’u’lláh thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation . . .” Just as one deputizes another to teach in one’s stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can

deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for attracting attention to the Teachings. A letter written on his behalf to an individual thus conveys the Guardian's view: "The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people."

While the friends and institutions everywhere bend their energies to implementing the requirements of the Plan, work on the great projects on Mount Carmel will continue towards their anticipated completion at the end of the century. By the end of the Plan at Ridván 2000, the buildings for the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Extension of the Archives Building will become operational; the International Teaching Centre building will have advanced to the final finishing stage. The section of the public road which now interrupts the path of the terraces above the Shrine of the Báb will have been lowered and a broad connecting bridge with its own gardens will have been built; five of the upper terraces will also have been completed. The remaining four upper terraces and the two at the foot of the mountain will be in an advanced stage of development. Other particular efforts will be pursued at the World Centre as well. Attention will be given to such matters as the universal application of additional laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the preparation of a new volume in English of selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the further development of the functions of the International Teaching Centre, and the devising of

measures for increasing the number of pilgrims and visitors to the World Centre.

The Bahá'í world community will expand its endeavors in both social and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and opportunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of development projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly through the community's involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the pursuit of these themes, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Bahá'ís and the United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the Bahá'í institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and increased efforts to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and nongovernmental organizations. In all such respects the Bahá'í friends and institutions are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external affairs and to give renewed attention to them.

The formation this Ridván of two National Spiritual Assemblies lends a propitious beginning to the Four Year Plan. We are delighted to announce that our two representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, Moldova; and Mr. Fred Schechter, Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre, Sao Tome and Principe. Regrettably, due to circumstances entirely beyond their control, the National Spiritual Assemblies of Burundi and Rwanda cannot be reelected this year. The number of these institutions worldwide will consequently remain at 174.

Ridván 2000, the point at which the Four Year Plan is to be concluded, will come many months before the end of the twentieth century. At that juncture in time, the Bahá'í world will look back in appreciation at the extraordinary developments and dazzling achievements that will have distinguished the annals of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh during that eventful period—a period which 'Abdu'l-Bahá called the “century of light.” Not the least of the accomplishments then to be recognized will be the completion of the current projects on Mount Carmel which, together with the other edifices on that holy mountain, will stand as a monument to the progress which the Administrative Order will have attained by that time in the Formative Age. The highlight of such appreciations will, God willing, be the holding at the World Centre of a major event to mark the completion of the buildings on the Arc and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb to the public.

Beloved Friends, we enter this Plan amid the turbulence of a period of accelerating transition. The twin processes prompted by the impact of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation are fast at work, gathering a momentum that will, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet.” One is an integrating process; the other is disruptive. Out of the “universal fermentation” created by these processes, peace will emerge in stages, through which the unifying effects of a growing consciousness of world citizenship will become manifest.

Towards that end, recent world developments have, paradoxically, been both shocking and reassuring. On one hand, the disarray of human affairs produces a daily diet of horrors that benumb the senses; on the other, world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá'í observer, signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations to solving world problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual frequency of the global occasions on which these leaders have gathered since the Holy Year four years ago, such as the one in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, at which the attending heads of state and heads of government asserted their commitment to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have been acting together in responding to a

variety of crises in different parts of the world. Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?

Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on any Bahá'í plan or action, and although it will not represent the ultimate goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace. The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the Bahá'í System that we will attract the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these processes. Two main challenges face us: one is to mount a campaign of teaching in which the broad membership of our community is enthusiastically, systematically and personally engaged, and in which the activation of an extensive training program will ensure the development of a mass of human resources; the other is to complete the construction projects on Mount Carmel towards which every sacrifice must be made to provide a liberal outpouring of material means. These twin foci, if resolutely pursued, will foster conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet.

However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God's Faith, as the Most Great Peace. In the meantime, people everywhere will often face despair and bewilderment before arriving at an appreciation of the transition in progress. We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent in the land in which our Cause was born.

For some seventeen years our persecuted brethren in Iran have demonstrated a constancy of faith and courage that has produced a vast proclamation of the Faith, forcing it out of obscurity. Here then is living evidence in our own time of the potencies of crisis and victory. Please God, it may not be too long before our Iranian brethren are relieved of the yoke they bear and are ushered into the glories and wonders of a victory that only the Blessed Beauty can bestow. Their experience is a signal and an example to us all wherever we may live; for eventually, opposition, as the Master has told us, will rear its head on all the continents. Though it may be of a different character from place to place, it will no doubt be intensive. But, thanks to the strengthening grace of Bahá'u'lláh and the demonstration of steadfastness by these noble friends, we shall know how to meet the shafts of the enemy without fear. Indeed, the Lord of Hosts has promised to deliver to His people an overwhelming and decisive triumph.

As humanity is tossed and tormented by the ravages inflicted upon it by a civilization gone out of control, let us keep our heads and hearts focused on the divine tasks set before us. For amid this turmoil opportunities will abound that must be exploited “for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.” This Plan to which we are now committed is set at one of the most critical times in the life of the planet. It is meant to prepare our community to cope with the accelerating changes that are occurring in the world about us and to place the community in a position both to withstand the weight of the accompanying tests and challenges and to make more visible a pattern of functioning to which the world can turn for aid and example in the wake of a tumultuous transition. Thus, this Plan acquires a special place in the scheme of Bahá'í and world history. Those of us who are alive to the vision of the Faith are particularly privileged to be consciously engaged in efforts intended to stimulate and eventually enhance such processes.

May you all arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment. May each inscribe his or her own mark on a brief span of time so charged with potentialities and hope for all humanity. Lest you become distracted

or preoccupied with the drastic happenings of this age of transition, bear ever in mind the advice of our infallible guide, Shoghi Effendi: “Not ours, puny mortals that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá’u’lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose of, to labor serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation of the forces which, as marshaled and directed by Bahá’u’lláh, are leading humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of power and glory.”

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996–AFRICA

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Africa

Dearly loved Friends,

You come to the Four Year Plan with an extraordinary history of achievement, which indicates that you are well equipped spiritually and administratively, and in the inherent potential of your people, to respond successfully to the Plan's central aim to advance the process of entry by troops. In whatever direction south of the Sahara one may look—whether to the eastern, western, central or southern region of the continent—portents of great, imminent expansion are evident. The torch of faith burns brightly in your hearts, setting our spirits aglow with gladness at the scale of your attainments and the magnificent possibilities that are now yours.

The bright hope inspired by such observations is justified by thrilling facts. The spiritual endowments of Africa derive naturally from the creative forces universally released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, but these have been marvellously enhanced by the continent's direct associations with the Channels of such forces: the ship transporting the Blessed Beauty on His exile to the Holy Land touched briefly its northern shores; the Centre of the Covenant spent extended periods in Egypt before and after His historic visit to the West. The continent was also twice crossed from south to north by the beloved Guardian. Bahá'u'lláh favoured the black peoples by making a specific

reference to them when, as the Master testified, He compared them to the “black pupil of the eye” through which “the light of the spirit shineth forth”.

African Bahá’í history had its beginnings in Egypt, which was opened to the Faith during the period of the ministry of Bahá’u’lláh; it gathered momentum during the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when Bahá’í localities were established in South Africa and Tunisia. But the early effects of these spiritual endowments became more obvious with the remarkable success of the two-year Africa Project (1951-53) when 16 territories were opened, bringing to 25 the total number of countries and islands in which Bahá’ís resided; this preceded the opening of the 33 virgin territories called for in the beloved Guardian’s Ten Year Global Crusade, a period of astonishing development in Africa that evoked the admiration and praise of Shoghi Effendi as many people from different tribes entered the Cause, a number of administrative institutions were formed, and it became possible to raise up the Mother Temple of Africa in the heart of the continent. During the course of these rapid developments, the African believers themselves, through sacrificial effort as teachers and pioneers, arose to champion the Cause of God, manifesting the profundity of their response to the Message of the New Day.

In the countries lying to the north where programmes of public teaching cannot now be pursued, the friends have continued for many years to maintain their posts with circumspection and heroic fortitude. Not only have they kept the flame of faith alive in their hearts, they also endeavour to transmit the fire of the love of God to members of their families, including their children and youth, in anticipation of the day when freedom to openly proclaim their religion and conduct their community affairs is secured.

With immense gratification we now look back over just a few decades during which Africa attained the largest number of National Spiritual Assemblies of any continent; moreover, Africa’s Local Spiritual Assemblies amount to a substantial percentage of the world’s total. The prodigious output of energy devoted to expansion and consolidation has included major endeavours to train the

believers and to mount and maintain development projects. As a result the African Bahá'í community can boast of notable progress in the establishment of a number of primary and secondary schools and training institutes. A source of much of this energy in recent times has been the African youth, who have increasingly demonstrated exemplary dedication and vigour in their Bahá'í activities. In the field of external affairs, the African community, whether in small or large states, has shown a boldness, a creativity, and a tenacity that have resonated in the worldwide proclamation of the Faith and the promotion of its vital interests.

Clearly, then, Africa is poised to register a victory for the Cause that will reaffirm its position among the front ranks of our world community. The time is critical, and you must act promptly to realize this prospect. We therefore urge our African brothers and sisters to take immediate account of their strengths, needs and opportunities, and then resolve to turn the challenge posed by these conditions into the means of success. You will of necessity give concentrated attention to various plans and programmes of activity if you are to advance to new stages of entry by troops, but simultaneously certain underlying requisites will claim your special vigilance and exertion. These are the elimination of tribal prejudice, the transformation of prevailing social practices, and the fostering of education.

Tribal conflict is one of the most pressing issues facing Africa. This must be dealt with in the heart of every faithful follower of Bahá'u'lláh and resolutely overcome through the collective will of every local and national Bahá'í community. Indeed, how can the lovers of the Blessed Beauty allow tribal prejudice and rivalry to be practised in their midst when He has made unity the pivotal principle and goal of His Faith? Hatred and animosity based on tribe, like those based on race, blight the human spirit and arrest the development of the society that accommodates them. If outside the Bahá'í community in recent years influential persons and public officials have been able to see the practical benefit of bringing diverse groups together towards unity, how much more should it be possible for those imbued with the spirit of our Teachings to strive to eliminate within the Bahá'í fellowship the unsavoury characteristics of tribal division and disunity. It is imperative and urgent in the current state of society for

the Bahá'ís so to practise genuine unity among themselves and in their relations to others that they may become renowned as a new people in the eyes of all Africans. Such a demonstration will attract divine confirmations and greatly reinforce their power to succeed in spreading the Teachings.

Much of what distinguishes African life is to be found in patterns of behaviour displayed in the tribe and particularly in the family. Increasingly, urban life threatens to destroy the positive qualities of such patterns. Since change is inevitable if progress is to be made by any African society, a primary challenge to Bahá'ís is to preserve and improve those wholesome aspects of tribal and family custom that are in accord with the Bahá'í Teachings and to dispense with those that are not. Such a challenge must be embraced with the understanding that the Book of God is the standard by which to weigh all forms of behaviour. While unwavering action is necessary, wisdom and tact and patience must, of course, be exercised. Let it be understood, too, that Africans are not alone in the struggle to change certain age-old practices. People everywhere have customs which must be abandoned so as to clear the path along which their societies must evolve towards that glorious, new civilization which is to be the fruit of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation. Indeed, in no society on earth can there be found practices which adequately mirror the standards of His Cause. His own truth-bearing Words clarify the matter: "The summons and the message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty. The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God's Revelation."

The acute inadequacy of plans and programmes to educate Africa's people poses a particular challenge to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that continent, for He has emphasized the importance of education for all; and individuals ought to be taught at least to read and write. The education of which Bahá'u'lláh spoke includes both spiritual and material aspects. The lack of such education affects the ability of people to achieve true progress. This matter should be of the keenest interest to all segments of the community. Parents have a special

responsibility to see that their children, both boys and girls, receive an education; and they must take care that the girls are not left behind, since well-educated girls are a guarantee of the excellence of future society; indeed, preference should, if necessary, be given to their education. Closely linked to this concern is the principle of the equality of men and women taught by Bahá'u'lláh. It is also highly desirable for adults, both men and women, who are illiterate to participate in literacy programmes, so that gradually all Bahá'ís will be able to read the Word of God for themselves. The Bahá'í community is not fully equipped to undertake what responsible authorities have neglected to do for the education of the people; however, the Bahá'í institutions at all levels are urged to give attention to these critical needs, as circumstances permit.

Bearing in mind these three foregoing considerations, you can move vigorously and wisely to tackle the manifold tasks implied by the Plan's emphasis on advancing the process of entry by troops. An extension of your efforts to effect both expansion and consolidation on a wholly new scale is imperative. The one suggests a powerful outward thrust of your teaching activities to cover the length and breadth of your countries, reaching the remotest areas with the Divine Message. The other indicates a drive to consolidate and multiply your gains through an ever-deepening penetration of spiritual knowledge of the Faith into the hearts of the believers, a systematic development of human resources, and a marked improvement in the functioning of your national and, particularly, your local institutions.

In all this exertion, the three components of the process—the individual, the institutions and the community—must assume their respective responsibilities. We especially expect you all to pursue every means at your disposal that will bring about the realization of an organic unity between the Local Spiritual Assembly and the community, and thereby establish a sharp contrast to the fragmentation of present-day social life. Thus, we long to see the individual African believers arise in greater numbers to claim the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as their own and to take on the requisite tasks of teaching and administering a rapidly expanding Faith. And we look for accumulating evidence that the Spiritual Assemblies are taking to heart their God-given mandate and are conscientiously fulfilling their

obligations to Bahá'u'lláh to foster the growth and development of vibrant communities in which adults, youth and children are more and more integrated and active. To fulfil these expectations is to demonstrate to a sceptical world the power of the Faith to hold aloft a new standard for the guidance of the nations, and eventually to attract the disillusioned masses to the security of God's Faith.

What specific actions, you may well ask, would indicate that you are fulfilling the basic requirement of the Plan in Africa? A reply would include mention of the following. Whatever the state of expansion in a community, take the next steps to increase enrolments, deepen the believers and strengthen the teaching force. Where entry by troops is in progress, intensify your efforts to stimulate further increase in the number of believers, while at the same time conducting a programme of training that will deepen the new believers and raise up new teachers on a continuing basis. Maximize action to bring families into the Faith by encouraging individuals in their duty to endeavour to lead as many of their family members as possible to the light of divine guidance. Regularize efforts to teach among the sub-Saharan Muslims. Proliferate the publication of Bahá'í literature and audio-cassette tapes, especially in vernacular languages. Swell the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies elected by their communities without help from outside. Support more abundantly the Funds of the Faith. Orient believers from among the traditional rulers to the Teachings, so that they will find appropriate ways to serve the Faith.

Moreover, extend provisions for children regularly to attend Bahá'í classes for their spiritual training. Give consistent attention to involving the youth in the expansion and consolidation work and to opening channels of activity suited to their talents and necessary for their development into mature Bahá'ís. Increase the number and effectiveness of observances of Nineteen Day Feasts. Expand the use of music and drama in the proclamation and teaching work, an effort in which Africa has already distinguished itself. Multiply plans and programmes to raise the status of women and to encourage the active support of men in such endeavours. Extend the range of your exertions in the fields of external affairs and social and economic development.

You will readily appreciate, then, the emphasis placed on multiplying the number of training institutes; for without them it will be impossible to meet the needs of hugely expanding communities. In some places, the friends may find it possible to offer sites and facilities for these essential operations, which must be located in as many areas as necessary to provide regular and well-organized training to increasing numbers of believers. The programmes of the institutes must be designed to instil in the participants a good understanding of the fundamental verities of the Faith and to help them acquire skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively.

Immediately after Ridván your National Spiritual Assemblies will initiate efforts to formulate, in consultation with the Counsellors, the details of the Four Year Plan, country by country. To ensure that the Plan is broadly based and responsive to the needs of all areas of a country, the participation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals, in evolving their own local plans and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be essential.

Dear Friends, we are acutely conscious of the crushing difficulties that afflict life in Africa: the conditions that have caused a flood of refugees on the continent, the horrors created by ethnic conflict, the political unrest, the economic distress, the high incidence of hunger and disease, the horrendous natural disasters. But, paradoxical as it may seem, there exist in all of these the very possibilities of your success. Your ability to endure and forge ahead is reinforced in the assurance given by the Divine Physician, Who anticipated all these conditions and prescribed a sure remedy. His prescriptions have been placed in your hands.

Therefore, we remind you of the noble ambitions the beloved Guardian held for you as a people in a continent that has “a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization.” May such memories resound afresh in your hearts, quickening your will to fulfil the major aim of the Plan before you, and setting a pace for your actions like the urgent rhythm of drums pulsating throughout your immensely potent, far-stretching land.

Our ardent prayer at the Holy Threshold on your behalf is that the divine storehouses of heaven may pour out their bounties upon you all, healing your ills, magnifying your powers, and enabling you to achieve victory upon victory.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996–AUSTRALASIA

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in *Australia, the Cook Islands, the Eastern Caroline Islands, the Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, the Hawaiian Islands, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Korea, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Western Caroline Islands*

Dearly loved Friends,

You are privileged to live in a region of the world unique in the opportunities it offers to advance the interests of the Faith during the course of the Four Year Plan. You constitute Bahá'í communities within, or on the fringe of, the vast Pacific Ocean, with which is associated this promise of Bahá'u'lláh: “Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost part of the ocean and, raising His voice proclaim: ‘I am the lifegiver of the world.’” At a time when the dear Bahá'í friends in the Cradle of the Faith yearn for the yoke of oppression to be lifted from their shoulders, you can compensate for their present and temporary inability to propagate the Faith if you undertake a sustained endeavour to convey the Divine Message to the peoples of your countries and multiply Bahá'í institutions throughout these lands.

Within your region is to be found a vast diversity of races, cultures, languages and religious traditions, illustrative of the major influences which have shaped the affairs of humanity throughout history. One of this region's distinguishing features is described by the Guardian as "a spiritual axis, extending from the Antipodes to the northern islands of the Pacific Ocean—an axis whose northern and southern poles will act as powerful magnets, endowed with exceptional spiritual potency, and towards which other younger and less experienced communities will tend for some time to gravitate." This emphasizes the vital role to be played by the Bahá'í communities of Northeastern Asia and of the Antipodes in the spiritual illumination of the surrounding areas.

Every country of the region must witness, in the course of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It is essential that the plans formulated on national and local levels reflect this vital aim. The advancement of this process will require that greater attention be given not only to fostering individual initiative in the teaching work, but also to developing human resources through the establishment and efficient operation of training institutes and other centres of learning, and to vastly increasing the strength and quality of the functioning of the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

We direct a special appeal to the indigenous believers in all parts of the Pacific region, men and women alike, to intensify their efforts to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and to strive for a position in the forefront of the promoters of the Faith through their teaching endeavours on the home front and their international cooperation in programmes of the Ocean of Light. As the tensions and divisions of a declining social order increase, the believers throughout the Pacific Islands should provide compelling testimony to the potency of the Bahá'í Teachings through their manifest unity transcending tribal, national or ethnic barriers. The desperate search for solutions to the social and economic problems afflicting these countries is tempting people, in increasing numbers, to indulge in partisan political activities; the indigenous Bahá'ís should refuse to be drawn into such divisive pursuits and should strive to acquire a more profound insight into the nature of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which offers a pattern for a future society

distinguished by justice and unity, far removed from the contention of competing political interests.

In many of the nations of your area, women have traditionally been restricted to a secondary role in the life of society. We call upon the Bahá'í women of these countries, assured of the support and encouragement of all elements of the Bahá'í community, to demonstrate the transforming power of this Revelation by their courage and initiative in the teaching work and their full participation in the administrative activities of the Faith.

In much of the region, insufficient attention has been given to the education of children. Far more extensive programmes should be initiated in those countries where the need exists, to ensure that Bahá'í children are nurtured, encouraged to acquire trained minds, illumined with a sound knowledge of the Divine Teachings, well-equipped to participate in the work of the Cause at all levels and to contribute to the arts, crafts and sciences necessary for the advancement of civilization. Such programmes, when open to all children, Bahá'í or not, offer a potent means of extending the beneficial influences of Bahá'u'lláh's Message to the wider society.

In Northeastern Asia, the progress of the Faith has been most encouraging, and a good foundation has been laid for the Bahá'ís of Japan and Korea to magnify the size of their communities substantially during the Four Year Plan, while making a notable contribution to the work of the Faith in neighbouring countries. Special attention should be given to the development of the Faith in the Ryukyu Islands and also to the exploration of any opportunities which might arise to carry the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all parts of the Korean peninsula.

The dedication and vitality of the Bahá'í community in the Philippine Islands is a constant source of joy to us. We look to the Filipino believers to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops during the Four Year Plan, while giving renewed attention to the strengthening of their Local Spiritual Assemblies and the

development of community life. This will necessitate the intensive use of training institutes throughout the country, and the involvement of a larger number of believers in these training programmes. The members of this devoted Bahá'í community provide a welcome source of manpower for the reinforcement of Bahá'í endeavours elsewhere, particularly in the Asian and Pacific regions.

We are well aware of the restrictions which have long afflicted the members of the Indonesian Bahá'í community. Their staunchness of faith, and their initiative in taking full advantage of whatever opportunities are open to them, attract our admiration and gratitude. We urge them to continue their endeavours throughout the whole of Indonesia, with full confidence that their hopes will be fulfilled in the future.

A special responsibility must rest upon the believers in Papua New Guinea, constituting the largest body of Bahá'ís in Australasia, to strive unceasingly to build a vibrant community which embraces all strata of society and which is renowned as a dynamic and enlightened segment of their nation. We look forward, in the course of the Four Year Plan, to a greater participation of the Bahá'í men and women of this country in the development of the Faith in other parts of Melanesia and elsewhere throughout the Pacific Islands.

In Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, there are well-established and soundly functioning Bahá'í communities, each characterized by an admirable record of accomplishments on the home front and by a notable contribution to the work of the Faith in other parts of the Pacific and beyond. We call upon the believers in these countries to strive for a fuller realization of their duty to advance the interests of the Faith on the home fronts and throughout the length and breadth of the Pacific region. In their own countries, they should aspire to far greater attainments, marked by a substantial increase in the number of adherents and an enhanced public awareness of the distinctive character of the Bahá'í Faith and its followers. They can render invaluable assistance to other Bahá'í communities, not only in the Pacific region but in Southeast Asia and beyond, because of the experience they have acquired in the teaching and administrative

fields and the resources to which they have access. The believers from the Pacific Islands who have taken up residence in these three countries should be mindful of the responsibilities which rest upon them to devise means by which they can contribute to the strengthening of the Bahá'í communities in the island nations from which they have come.

Many of the valiant Bahá'í communities of the Pacific Islands are distinguished by the fact that they constitute significant percentages of the populations of their countries. The believers in these island nations need to direct their attention, more than ever, to the propagation of the Faith. They should also concentrate on the development of a distinctive community life, based on an uncompromising adherence to the precepts of the Faith, and guided by well-functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies, which will demonstrate to the entire populations of their countries the unifying and transforming power of the Faith, and will attract to the Cause a multitude of new believers. Through this effort, they can make a vital contribution to enhancing the worldwide prestige of the Faith, and can lay the foundation for even more outstanding victories in the future. We urge them to give attention to sharply increasing their level of international cooperation in pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, including support of the establishment of a strong Bahá'í community in French Polynesia as a basis for the future election of a National Spiritual Assembly there.

Almost four decades have passed since Shoghi Effendi described the Pacific region in which you live as “that vast area of the globe, an area endowed with unimaginable potentialities, and which, owing to its strategic position, is bound to feel the impact of world-shaking forces, and to shape to a marked degree through the experience gained by its peoples in the school of adversity, the destinies of mankind.” Since that time your nations have come ever more fully under the influence of the forces which are causing turmoil and disorder to human society, while the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have laboured, undeterred and with admirable dedication, to advance the Cause of their Lord and to establish His institutions. The Pacific area, where, as the Guardian stated, “Bahá'í exploits bid fair to outshine the feats achieved in any other ocean, and indeed in every continent

of the globe”, now stands at the threshold of victories far greater than any yet won. We call upon you to go forward now as never before, assured of our ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, confident of your ultimate triumph.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996—INDIA AND SUB-CONTINENT

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka*

Dearly loved Friends,

With bright hopes and high expectations, we turn our thoughts towards you, who, serving in a region at the forefront of large-scale expansion, find yourselves poised to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, the central aim of the Four Year Plan. Your region, which claims a substantial percentage of the world's people, has a Bahá'í population that already exceeds by far that of any other area of the globe.

By virtue of its immense natural and human resources, its magnificent history and the rich cultural diversity of its inhabitants, India plays a prominent role in the shaping of human affairs. Throughout the history of the Faith, it has been the recipient of countless blessings and the arena of unparalleled triumphs. Mentioned by the Báb in the first of His Writings, India is eternally honoured to have had one of its native sons numbered among the Letters of the Living, privileged to behold the first rays of the Dawn of a New Day. Bahá'u'lláh Himself selected and dispatched emissaries to propagate His Faith in India, and, under the direction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, streams of teachers from both Iran

and the West continued to flow to that land to help the believers carry forward the standard of Divine guidance.

In response to the bountiful favours conferred upon them over the decades, the friends in India have made sacrificial efforts for the progress of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and have achieved splendid victories in His Name. They first demonstrated their ability to initiate entry by troops as early as the closing years of the Ten Year Crusade when they enlisted thousands of receptive souls into the ranks of His followers. The sudden influx of new adherents to the Cause from all castes and creeds—clear evidence of the receptivity of that great nation—transformed a small body of believers into a vibrant and broadly based community which gradually learned to shoulder immense and inescapable responsibilities. Its valiant members, relying on the unfailing grace of Bahá'u'lláh, surmounted the obstacles before them, persevered, and sustained their efforts until India came to occupy a privileged place in the eyes of the Bahá'ís of the world.

The Indian Bahá'í community has gone from strength to strength. It has established the institutions of the Faith throughout the length and breadth of that vast country, including suitable agencies to administer the affairs of the Cause in each state; has undertaken countless projects and campaigns of expansion and consolidation; has produced and disseminated literature in a wide array of languages; has pursued numerous projects of social and economic development, especially in the field of education; and, aided by the power of attraction of its House of Worship, has proclaimed the Faith to many millions of people. From every standpoint—its administrative structure, its relations with the government, its experience in large-scale expansion, and the devotion of the active supporters of its programmes and projects—the Indian community stands in an enviable position at the beginning of this, the Four Year Plan.

The Bahá'í community of Bangladesh, flourishing in the midst of a Muslim society, is a source of joy to the entire Bahá'í world. In recent years and with astonishing rapidity, that community began to achieve extraordinary success in the teaching field, and throughout the Three

Year Plan it has sustained consistently large-scale expansion. Its institutions have demonstrated their capacity to mobilize the human resources at their disposal, and those who have responded to the call for action have sacrificially and with the utmost devotion spread the Divine Teachings among the Muslim, Hindu and tribal populations of that country. The purity of their motives and the sincerity of their efforts to address the needs of society have won them recognition from government officials in the highest circles. Their exertions to promote love and unity among the majority Muslim and minority Hindu populations are bearing increasing fruit, a striking testimony to the potency of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

In the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, the believers have, through the integrity of their character and the excellence of their conduct, overcome in recent years restrictions on the expansion of the Cause. They are now held in high regard and are successfully engaged in presenting the Faith to the people as a unifying force which can contribute to the progress of the nation. As they grow in strength, they can begin to look beyond their own borders and assist in the propagation of the Faith in those areas to which they have such easy access.

In the Indian Ocean, the Bahá'í community of Sri Lanka, a nation with a predominantly Buddhist population, is addressing diligently the challenges of growth. In spite of a number of set-backs in the past, the friends have persevered and are using the power of their hard-won unity to respond to the needs of that sorely tried country, whose suffering people thirst for the vivifying waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Farther to the east, the Bahá'í community of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has steadily grown over the years and is blessed with sincere and devoted believers, whose efforts won them the distinction of having their own National Spiritual Assembly.

Dear Friends, the receptivity of your peoples and the extraordinary advances you have already made enable you to approach the challenges of entry by troops with vigour and optimism, and to give systematic attention to the tasks that must be diligently carried out to ensure accelerated growth.

Your past exploits were largely the result of the incessant labours of a comparatively few consecrated believers who devoted their time and resources to the spread of the Cause in locality after locality. If you are to sustain rapid expansion and consolidation in the coming years, it is imperative that far greater numbers of dedicated and committed souls arise to promote these twin processes. Training courses—widespread, regular and well-organized—constitute the most effective means to mobilize believers on the scale required. Depending on the conditions of your countries, such courses will be conducted by teachers associated with national, state or regional institutes, some of which may well have several branches. Although the programmes of the institutes may vary according to the characteristics of the populations they serve, their essential functions will be the same. They should seek to develop in the participants a good understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's essential Teachings and to help them acquire those skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively. They should also strive to imbue their hearts with a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh—a love from which stems a desire to submit oneself to His Will, to obey His laws, to heed His exhortations and to promote His Faith.

While all the participants in these courses will naturally be directed to the field of teaching, a sufficient number will also have to acquire the ability to assist with the development of local communities. In a region of the world where villages constitute a major component of every nation, a concerted effort must be made to establish in them the patterns of Bahá'í community life on a firm basis. This can only be achieved through perseverance and constancy in working with the local communities. The friends in each locality must be helped to raise their awareness of the efficacy of the Teachings they have accepted and to broaden their vision of the tasks and opportunities before them. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be helped to take up the challenges of community development and of expansion.

In this respect, we call upon you to give special attention to the advancement of women. In almost all of your region, women have traditionally played a secondary role in the life of society, a condition which is still reflected in many Bahá'í communities. Effective measures have to be adopted to help women take their rightful place

in the teaching and administrative fields. By teaching entire families, you can ensure that increasing numbers of women enter the Faith, thereby improving the balance in the composition of your communities and beginning in each family, from the moment of acceptance, a process through which the fundamental principle of the equality between men and women can be realized.

Of course, your successes in the teaching field and in the development of local communities will only yield lasting results if you ensure the proper education of children and youth. Youth will undoubtedly be the most enthusiastic supporters of the programmes of your institutes. They are eager to make a significant contribution to the progress of their communities and have shown, time and again, their capacity to respond to the call to service. They can be trained to help shoulder the manifold responsibilities demanded by rapid expansion and consolidation. But it is especially important for large numbers of them to become capable teachers of Bahá'í children's classes. As you are well aware, without the education of children it is impossible to maintain victories from one generation to the next.

All these tasks will require your concentrated attention. It is important, too, that you maintain the momentum which the activities of social and economic development have gained, especially in India. Within their own sphere of competence, the specialized institutes, the schools and other projects are each engaged in work critical to the development of human resources. We hope that those who benefit from such programmes will generously offer their talents to the institutions of the Faith in furthering the interests of the Four Year Plan.

As you respond to the requirements of the plans soon to be formulated by your institutions, you must ever bear in mind that you will contribute to the central aim of the Four Year Plan only if you teach persistently, prayerfully, lovingly and wisely. You should endeavour to bring into your ranks individuals from every stratum of society as you vigorously advance in the process of entry by troops. Receptive souls should be sought among the affluent and the indigent, in the various circles of urban society and in schools and

universities, in centres of industry and commerce and in the vast rural areas of your countries. You should also remember that your exertions are not to be limited to your own home fronts, but that from among you must continue to arise an increasing number of souls to serve as pioneers and travelling teachers in the international field.

In the coming years, enormous spiritual forces will be acting upon your peoples. You should be confident that your exertions will have a powerful effect on the course of their destinies. Let the words of the Guardian written during the first of the systematic plans to be launched in your region guide your endeavours: “You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of Bahá’u’lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power and arise to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and blessings.”

May the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty be ceaselessly showered upon you, and His All-Powerful Spirit inspire and sustain you throughout the collective enterprise on which you now embark.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996—SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in *Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam*

Dearly loved Friends,

Some four decades ago, in a message to the first Regional Convention of the Bahá'ís of Southeast Asia, the Guardian wrote of the “far-reaching influence” that area would exercise on the “future destinies of the world Bahá'í community”. He referred to the area’s “heterogeneous character” and “geographical position”, underscored “the spiritual receptivity of many of its inhabitants”, and drew attention to “the role they are destined to play in the future shaping of the affairs of mankind”. The remarkable progress of the Faith in Southeast Asia since that time, in a period of social and political upheaval, is but a prelude to the fulfilment of the Guardian’s promise. This, taken together with the recent accomplishments of the believers in the neighbouring territories as far north as Mongolia, gives rise to a brilliant vision of future triumphs in the entirety of that vast region.

You now embark on the next stage of your endeavours, a Four Year Plan whose aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. Among your peoples, the majority of whom have been influenced by noble and high-minded teachings of Buddhism, are many who possess a profound sense of spirituality, which is

reflected in the practices of their daily lives and in the quality of their relationships with one another, with nature, and with their social institutions. They have a keen understanding of the need for coherence between the material and the spiritual, and are disturbed by the effects of gross materialism on their societies in recent years. Your region represents a vast reservoir of potential promoters of the Cause waiting to be tapped. The number and quality of the active supporters of the Faith with which it is already blessed bespeak the richness of that reservoir.

Systematic training programmes constitute the most potent instrument at your disposal for realizing the potential of that highly promising region to contribute significantly to the human resources of the Faith. To this end, the establishment and strengthening of institutes will undoubtedly be a central component of the plans of all your countries. Your participation in institute programmes, through which you will deepen your knowledge of the Faith, cultivate your inner spiritual lives and develop abilities of service, will enable you to intensify your individual and collective exertions in the teaching field and will result in a commensurate acceleration in the expansion of your communities. Varying patterns of growth, of course, will evolve according to the particular conditions in each country.

In Malaysia, large numbers of believers from among the Chinese, Indian and indigenous populations can be mobilized, and their energies directed towards the stimulation of activity at the local level. Many of the local communities are in a position to implement plans and projects under the direction of their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and they should be encouraged and aided in their efforts to do so. The capacity to achieve rapid and simultaneous expansion and consolidation exists in Malaysia, but needs to be fully exercised. Such an undertaking must be complemented by concrete measures to broaden the range of activities in areas such as the advancement of women, the spread of literacy, and the promotion of moral education—areas in which the Malaysian community already has an impressive record. In addition to contributing to the progress of society, such activities will go far in winning the admiration and respect of the enlightened in government circles and, beyond that, in drawing the

attention of leaders of thought throughout the region to the Teachings of the Faith.

The Bahá'í community of Myanmar, which traces its roots back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, has in recent years been able to pay increasing attention to the expansion of the Faith. The results have been encouraging indeed. The large body of believers in Myanmar, faithful to the Covenant and with hearts filled with love for Bahá'u'lláh, who stand ready to serve His Faith, can be helped by the institute programme now being established there to enter the field of teaching with confidence. The effects such an endeavour will have, in a land so receptive to the Divine Message, are incalculable.

The friends in Thailand may draw courage from the success of their efforts to help re-establish the Bahá'í community of Cambodia and resolve to turn with the same vigour and determination to the tasks of expansion and consolidation in their homeland. There they have proved themselves capable of teaching among many strata of society and of bringing into their ranks people of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Setting aside all hesitation, and with unity of thought and purpose, let them dedicate the coming four years to the unflagging pursuit of a clearly defined course of action traced for them by their institutions.

In Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where possibilities for growth exist in varying degrees, the sorely tried, steadfast and devoted friends need to demonstrate to the authorities and leaders of their countries that Bahá'ís, obedient and loyal to their governments, desire but the prosperity of their nations and the upliftment of their peoples. Through the spiritual enrichment of families in Vietnam, through the programme of deepening in small groups now initiated in Laos, and through systematic plans for expansion and consolidation and for social and economic development in Cambodia, where the friends enjoy greater freedom, each of these communities can achieve substantial progress within the parameters defined for them by prevailing social and political conditions.

The manner in which the Bahá'í community of Mongolia, so young and so full of vitality, has taken its affairs in hand is exhilarating. In the span of seven years, the friends have ranged methodically across that vast land and have established the Faith on solid and enduring foundations. At the national level, they are becoming known for their high ideals, particularly as champions of the rights of children. At the same time, their Bahá'í classes, open to children from Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í families alike, are being received with great enthusiasm, presenting them with extensive teaching opportunities. There is a spirit in the Mongolian people which must needs manifest itself in the efflorescence of a numerically strong, vibrant community.

The Bahá'í community of Singapore is energetic and dedicated. Its past experience demonstrates that focused attention on expansion invariably brings good results. What is required at this stage of the community's development is an accelerating increase in the number of individual enrolments. Such an influx of new souls will continually strengthen the community which, although comparatively small, has demonstrated its ability to play an important role in the affairs of the Faith in the region.

Dear Friends, any attempt to present, no matter how briefly, an overview of the potentialities of your region must necessarily take into account the preponderating influence that the Chinese people are to exert on the destiny of humankind. To them, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has referred as "truth-seeking" and "prompted with ideal motives". From among them, He declared, can be raised "such divine personages that each one of them may become the bright candle of the world of humanity." The progress of the Faith in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the labours of the Chinese believers resident in other parts of the region, are early indications of that which is yet to come. We turn our expectant eyes towards the Chinese people, confident in their ability to become illumined with the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and to apply His Teachings, with characteristic diligence, to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. As larger and larger numbers become imbued with heavenly qualities, and as they make sincere exertions for the progress of their people, they shall, God willing, win the trust of fair-minded leaders and be able to

broaden the scope of their endeavours in a land that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has designated “the country of the future”.

We shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh may sustain you and guide you in your noble services to His Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996–EUROPE

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Europe

Dearly loved Friends,

Forty-three years ago, when the European Bahá'ís gathered at the conference in Stockholm called by the beloved Guardian for the launching of the mighty Ten Year Crusade in your continent, you had but three National Spiritual Assemblies—those of the British Isles, of Germany and Austria, and of Italy and Switzerland—together with slowly developing local communities in the other countries of western Europe. In the east, cut off by political barriers, were tiny remnants of communities which had been raised up in earlier years and, in neighbouring Turkey, was a small, struggling national community. As the European believers of that time contemplated the awe-inspiring tasks before them, they heard the words of the Guardian, illuminating the historical significance of the continent in which they were to build the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Order:

A continent, occupying such a central and strategic position on the entire planet; so rich and eventful in its history, so diversified in its culture; from whose soil sprang both the Hellenic and Roman civilizations; the mainspring of a civilization to some of whose features Bahá'u'lláh Himself paid tribute; on whose southern shores Christendom first established its home; along whose eastern marches

the mighty forces of the Cross and the Crescent so frequently clashed; on whose southwestern extremity a fast-evolving Islamic culture yielded its fairest fruit; in whose heart the light of the Reformation shone so brightly, shedding its rays as far as the outlying regions of the globe . . .

This, your continent, whose soil was blessed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, which was twice visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His epoch-making journeys following His release from imprisonment, whose travellers and scholars early responded to the dawning light of the Bábi Revelation, two of whose governments extended the hand of succour during the Heroic Age of the Faith, and whose nations, in recent years, have intervened so effectively in defence of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran, has amply demonstrated the capacity of its people to rally to the banner of the Cause of God, once their hearts are touched and their minds awakened to its Message.

In the course of these forty-three years the European Bahá'í communities have shown great vitality. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies has risen to thirty-four, covering the entire continent and embracing, in the case of Russia, vast territories as far as the Pacific Ocean. Great victories have been won for the Faith by European pioneers in Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean region and Greenland. Your institutions have distinguished themselves in external affairs. Your communities include outstanding scholars of the Faith, musicians, artists, scientists and those concerned with the application of Bahá'í Teachings to economics and business. You have exerted special efforts for the advancement of women and the strengthening of family life. The European Bahá'í Youth Council provides a focal point and a source of stimulation to the youth in all parts of Europe, complemented by a network of National and Local Youth Committees closely linked to and supported by their National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now is the time to build on these achievements, clearly focusing all efforts on the central purpose of taking the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to a spiritually famished population.

The first task of your National Spiritual Assemblies immediately after Ridván will be to formulate, in consultation with the Counsellors, the details of the Four Year Plan, country by country. The participation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers in evolving their own local plans, and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be essential for the successful achievement of the high aims of this stage of the implementation of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Europe is a continent of great variety, and each of your National Assemblies will be studying with care the processes and achievements required for the advancement of the Cause of God in its area during the coming four years. Each must consider the current condition of its community, the territory within which it is working, and areas of potential collaboration with other Bahá’í communities. Special attention will need to be paid to the attainment of official recognition in those countries where the institutions of the Faith are not yet legally incorporated, and to raising up National Spiritual Assemblies in certain of those independent countries and major islands, such as the Faroes, which have not yet attained them. There are, however, certain elements of an even wider vision which must be considered as they apply to specific countries, groups of countries and the entire continent.

There are areas which cry out for pioneers and travelling teachers; the mind turns, for example, to the work among the Sami and the other peoples of the arctic and sub-arctic areas as far north as Spitsbergen. We contemplate the significance of teaching the Faith in the islands of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the North Sea; the continent-wide importance of the Romany peoples, who have begun to show such receptivity to the call of Bahá’u’lláh; the opportunity for the European Bahá’í communities to demonstrate the salutary nature of the Teachings in relation to minorities of every kind; the specific tasks described by the beloved Guardian as the destiny of certain communities, and their responsibilities in far-flung lands where their languages are spoken; the implications of the advancement of the Faith in Italy where is to be found “the heart and stronghold of the leading, the most ancient and powerful Church of Christendom”; the need to rapidly increase the number of Bahá’í centres in the vast areas

of the Ukraine and European Russia; and, beyond this, the special responsibilities and opportunities of the Bahá'í community of the Russian Federation, the larger part of whose area lies in Asia and must continue to benefit from collaboration with neighbouring communities of central, southern and eastern Asia as well as Alaska, Canada and the United States. All these are but some examples of the challenges which you face in the years ahead.

The central aim of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is of especial significance for Europe. You should have no misgivings—it is a process that can advance in all parts of Europe, in the west as well as in the east. All should recognize that entry by troops is an inevitable stage in the development of the Cause. The nature of the process is clarified in the compilation on the subject, whence it becomes apparent that the desired outcome, a sustained entry by troops, cannot be achieved by a mere series of spasmodic, uncoordinated exertions, no matter how enthusiastic. Confidence; unity of vision; systematic, realistic, but audacious planning; acceptance of the fact that mistakes will be made, and willingness to learn from these mistakes; and, above all, reliance on the guidance and sustaining confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh will advance this process.

The establishment of training institutes in various locations is emphasized in the Four Year Plan because current methods, valuable though they are, are not adequate by themselves to meet the challenges of this new stage in the growth of the Cause. The character and structure of the training institutes must be adapted to the conditions of each country and region; clearly their form in Europe will not be identical with that of training institutes in the rural areas of India. Their essential functions, however, will be the same. They will foster a firm acceptance of Bahá'í identity in those who take part: the capacity to look upon the world and its conditions from the point of view of the Teachings rather than from the standpoint of one's nationality or non-Bahá'í background. They will help to develop in each participant a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, a good understanding of His essential Teachings and an awareness of the importance of developing the spiritual life of each individual through prayer, meditation and immersion in the Sacred Writings. They will also

cover such practical matters as how to teach the Faith, for there are too many who, for lack of confidence in their ability to do so, are hesitant to convey the Message. The transformation that such deepening in the Faith produces will surely inflame the hearts of the individual friends with the longing to share this Message with those around them, and this is the seed of all success in teaching. Those who have attended training institutes will be able to help the other Bahá'ís, new and old, to increase their potential for teaching, and so to greatly increase the human resources of the Cause, in which every believer is a teacher.

The teaching of the Faith by the friends in Europe must increase in range; it must be varied, spontaneous and individual on the one hand, and focused, united and mutually supportive on the other. It must be both inspiring and practical and must, above all, be informed with serene faith in the power of Bahá'u'lláh. You should widen the field of your teaching work to include the country people and the masses labouring in the cities; people of little education as well as intellectuals in university towns. You should consciously approach every stratum of society, adapting your methods, literature and audio-visual materials to each audience. Both the heart and the mind need to be fed; both spiritual force and intellectual clarity must be recognized as vital elements of the teaching work. You have excelled in the use of the arts for the proclamation, expansion and consolidation of the Faith; this is a key to opening many doors and should be encouraged and developed. Your unity, enthusiasm, confidence and perseverance, strengthened and guided by the power of prayer, cannot fail to act as a channel for divine confirmations, which will be a magnet to seeking souls.

For our part, we shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that you, who have won such historic victories in your homelands and throughout the world, will enter during the Four Year Plan into a stage of even greater achievement, presaging the as yet unimaginable glories destined to unfold during the twenty-first century.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996–LATIN AMERICA

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in *Latin America and the Caribbean*

Dearly loved Friends,

As you contemplate the challenges awaiting you during these closing years of the century, you may draw confidence from the knowledge that your past endeavours have been abundantly blessed by divine confirmation. Some sixty years ago, when the Guardian had called for the establishment of at least one centre in each of the Central and South American Republics, he wrote of “the strenuous and organized labours by which future generations of believers in the Latin countries must distinguish themselves”. Addressing the friends in the Caribbean some years later in a letter written shortly after the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of the Greater Antilles, he urged them to exert “continuous and systematic effort”, to evince “unyielding determination” and to display “whole-hearted consecration”. Your achievements during the intervening decades have amply demonstrated your capacity to meet his expectations. You have proved by the spirit animating your efforts to be well deserving of such tributes as “staunch”, “warm-hearted”, “eager”, “spiritually minded”.

The central concern of the plans that will guide your endeavours during the coming four years will be to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This challenge you will not be facing

as novices. You have accumulated through successive plans valuable experience which must now be brought to bear on the aim of the Four Year Plan with clarity and single-mindedness. Your success will depend on the degree to which you can, on the one hand, intensify activity in the areas that have already witnessed large-scale expansion and, on the other, exploit the fresh opportunities presented to you as a result of your growing involvement in the affairs of society.

Your numerical strength lies in those many regions where, over the decades, intense teaching activities have been undertaken among diverse populations. Through these exertions, large numbers from most of the indigenous tribes—singled out by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be the recipients of special favours and promises—as well as people of the African, Asian and European races, have enlisted under the banner of the Faith. As a result, your community now boasts of a harmonious blend of groups from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Plans focusing on these areas of large-scale expansion will necessarily seek to mobilize an appreciable number of believers within each population not only to labour diligently in their own local communities, but also to serve as long and short-term pioneers and visiting teachers in other localities. Training programmes, with which many of your communities have considerable experience, constitute a most potent instrument for the accomplishment of such a vast mobilization. We call upon you, then, to support the work of the training institutes in your countries, the more experienced among you giving generously of their time as teachers so that courses can be offered widely and consistently. As you acquire new knowledge and skills through these programmes, you will be able to put into practice with enthusiasm and zeal what you have learned, and arise to shoulder the manifold responsibilities that accelerated expansion and consolidation demand.

This mobilization will greatly facilitate the development of local communities, a task that in the past has not been an easy one to accomplish. Your labours in this field of endeavour must now be systematically and vigorously multiplied, utilizing the valuable methods and approaches that have been devised in many of your

countries in recent years. A host of dedicated workers is needed within each population who, supported by Auxiliary Board members, regional committees and institutes, focus their energies on the strengthening of community after community. Let those of you who arise, even when you can find but a handful of believers in a locality, gather them together, broaden their vision, and raise their awareness of the greatness of the Cause they have embraced. Help the Local Spiritual Assembly to launch the community on a path of systematic expansion and consolidation, bringing in new recruits or revitalizing those who, having accepted the Faith years ago, have seen their enthusiasm wane. Remember, moreover, that in this process of community building the education of children—without which the victories of a whole generation may be lost—must be given due emphasis.

While paying close attention to areas of large-scale expansion, you should not lose sight of the fact that your nations have undergone profound change over the past decades, resulting in increased receptivity to the Faith in many sectors of society. You have, in each of your national communities, developed remarkable capacity to interact with society at large. Through your extensive work in social and economic development, especially in the area of education, through your discourse on issues such as the preservation of the environment and the organization of social action, through your substantive interactions with leaders of thought, you are developing a keen understanding of the needs and aspirations of your peoples which enhances your ability to present the Faith to a wide range of interests.

Together with your increased involvement in the affairs of society, you will need to make a concerted effort to attract receptive souls from diverse groups, teaching them and confirming them in the Faith. In this respect, the climate of search prevailing among both the leaders and the masses in your countries, which has emerged following the ideological upheaval of recent years, is of special significance. Two sectors have been particularly and differently affected and are athirst for the life-giving waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: on the one hand, the teachers in the national school systems and, on the other, university students and their professors.

Historically, both have exerted widespread influence in your societies, and should you teach them systematically, you will certainly reap abundant fruits.

In all of this great endeavour—pursuing large-scale expansion and consolidation, furthering the work of external affairs and carrying out activities of social and economic development—you must be driven by a passion to teach the Faith. Let regular study of the Writings feed the flame of your enthusiasm. Let His Words so shape your thoughts that the most pressing obligation of your lives becomes the sharing of His Message with others. The designation given to the Latin American communities by the Guardian as the associates of the chief executors of the Divine Plan has defined for you a vast arena of service. As you take up the tasks of the Four Year Plan, keep in mind the words of the Guardian calling on the individual believer to “ . . . shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.”

We shall remember each and all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá'u'lláh to vouchsafe to you His unfailing protection and guidance, as you boldly go forth to conquer the hearts of men.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996—NORTH AMERICA

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in North America: *Alaska, Canada, Greenland and the United States*

Dearly loved Friends,

As members of the North American Bahá'í community, you enter the Four Year Plan with a brilliant record of progress in fulfilling the mandate issued by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. In the eight decades since you received this mandate, your prodigious exertions have carried the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all parts of your continent, and throughout the length and breadth of the planet. You have played a critical role in the establishment of the framework of the Administrative Order and in the sustained proclamation of the Faith. These Tablets launched you on a worldwide enterprise which you, and the generations to succeed you, are called upon to continue during the vast period of time stretching throughout the Formative Age and into the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

In your pursuit of the provisions of the Four Year Plan on national, regional and local levels, in conformity with the detailed plans to be formulated in the weeks ahead, you should constantly bear in mind the one central aim of the Plan: advancing the process of entry by troops. There can be no doubt that this process, propelled by mysterious spiritual forces beyond the ken of the skeptic, will in due course quicken the souls of a multitude from every background in

North America and dramatically increase the numerical strength of your communities.

Training institutes and other centres of learning are an indispensable element of a sustained endeavour to advance this process, and to ensure that the essential deepening of new believers is not neglected, that they develop the necessary skills to effectively teach the Faith, and that an opportunity is provided for all Bahá'ís, new and veteran, to embark on a systematic study of the fundamental verities of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. We look to your communities to make an energetic response to the call for such institutes, and to develop a wide variety of approaches fitted to the needs of the diverse components of your population.

In one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, exhorting the North American believers to strive to attain the exalted station of Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, specifies firmness in the Covenant to be a prerequisite for this achievement. We urge you to manifest unwavering adherence to the provisions of the Covenant, while ever striving for a deeper understanding of its challenging features and of its implications, which far transcend the familiar arrangements of present society.

You are in a most enviable position to provide a mighty impetus to the teaching work. Through the alertness and perseverance of your institutions and the effect of your exertions, there is now a general awareness of, and respect for, the Cause in your region, and the Faith has acquired a reputation for universality and liberality of thought. Well may you rejoice at this remarkable achievement, and well may you contemplate the present needs of the Cause with eagerness and confidence.

Your accomplishments have prepared the way for even more spectacular successes in the years immediately ahead. Now as never before should you strive mightily to free yourselves from the obstacles of apathy, attachment to worldly pursuits, and lethargy, which stand in the way of so glorious a realization. As the people

around you yearn increasingly for a society in which rectitude of conduct prevails, which is animated by a nobility of moral behaviour, and in which the diverse races are firmly united, your challenge is to demonstrate the efficacy of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in ministering to their needs and in recreating the very foundation of individual and social life. The whole of North America stands in desperate need of the inspiring vision, the dynamic sense of purpose and the idealism, which can be provided only by those who are imbued with the spirit and truths of the Bahá'í Writings.

The community of the Greatest Name must increasingly become renowned for its social cohesion, and for the spirit of trust and confidence which distinguishes the relationship between believers and their institutions. In the earliest years of his ministry, the Guardian stated, “. . . I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centres of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigour. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation up which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.” Realization of this longing requires that you commit yourselves to the wholehearted support of your institutions. In turn, those of you called upon to serve as members of such bodies should ever be mindful of the attitude and manner prescribed for the conduct of their duties, and should strive continually to approach the exalted standard set out in the Teachings.

In the Divine Plan bequeathed to you by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is disclosed the glorious destiny of those who are the descendants of the early inhabitants of your continent. We call upon the indigenous believers who are firmly rooted in the Bahá'í Teachings to aid, through both deed and word, those who have not yet attained that level of understanding. Progress along the path to their destiny requires that they refuse to be drawn into the divisiveness and militancy around them, and that they strive to make their own distinctive contribution to the pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, both beyond the confines of North America and at home. They should be ever mindful

of the vital contribution they can make to the work of the Faith throughout the American continent, in the circumpolar areas and in the Asian region of the Russian Federation.

We direct the attention of the believers of African descent, so beloved by the Master, to the pressing need for pioneers, who will contribute to the further development of the Cause in distant areas, including the continent of Africa for which they were assigned a special responsibility by the Guardian when the first systematic campaign was launched for its spiritual illumination. Although their contributions to all aspects of Bahá'í service on the home front and elsewhere will be of great value, they can be a unique source of encouragement and inspiration to their African brothers and sisters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Increasingly over the years, the Bahá'í community in North America has been augmented by the addition of a substantial number of believers who have come from the Cradle of the Faith. We urge all the friends of Persian background, who constitute a most valuable source of ability and experience, to dedicate themselves, to an extent surpassing their past services, to the accomplishment of the goals of the Four Year Plan, under the leadership and guidance of the institutions of the Faith in North America. The unity of thought and endeavour between the friends from East and West will offer a shining example of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to demolish traditional barriers and will be a powerful source of attraction to the Cause.

The Alaskan Bahá'ís are privileged to live in an area described by the Guardian as “a region destined to play an important role in shaping the spiritual destinies of the great Republic of the West of which it forms a part, and to contribute, in no small measure, to the establishment of the institutions of His World Order throughout the American continent” The invaluable contribution they have made to the establishment of the Faith in Siberia in recent years, together with their significant advances in strengthening the home front, provide compelling evidence of their capacity to take full advantage of the opportunities before them in the Four Year Plan.

The valiant Canadian Bahá'í community was praised by the Guardian for “the staunchness of the faith of its members, their unyielding resolve, their ceaseless efforts, their willingness to sacrifice, their exemplary loyalty, their steadfast courage,” a description fully confirmed by the record of its achievements during the Three Year Plan. It has played a disproportionately great and much-appreciated role in the defence of the Faith, in its propagation to all corners of the earth, and in the establishment of its institutions in other lands, both near and far, and is in an enviable position to build upon these successes in the new Plan on which it now embarks.

Our thoughts turn often to the Bahá'í community of Greenland, whose staunchness of faith and dogged perseverance have won our admiration and praise, and have resulted in the Faith's becoming firmly established in that distant land. Inspired by the promise set out in the Tablets of the Divine Plan that “if the hearts be touched with the heat of the love of God, that territory will become a divine rose-garden and a heavenly paradise, and the souls, even as fruitful trees, will acquire the utmost freshness and beauty,” let them now go forth to claim new victories on the home front and to transform their nation through the power of the Divine Teachings.

Some four decades ago, Shoghi Effendi described the members of the United States Bahá'í community as “the outstanding protagonists of the Cause of God; the stout-hearted defenders of its integrity, its claims and its rights; the champion-builders of its Administrative Order; the standard-bearers of its crusading hosts; the torchbearers of its embryonic civilization; the chief succourers of the down-trodden, the needy and the fettered among its followers . . .” Any survey of the distinguished accomplishments of these dearly loved friends during the past three years provides striking evidence of the continuing applicability of this description, and of the immense contribution they are making to the advancement of the Cause. We look to the members of the Bahá'í community in the United States to perform, during the Four Year Plan, heroic deeds of service to the Cause, which will astonish and inspire their fellow-believers throughout the world.

In North America, there are opportunities for the advancement of the process of entry by troops, the like of which presently exist in no other place on earth. Three unique characteristics combine to give rise to this condition: the unparalleled strength of your local communities, particularly evident in the activity of your Local Spiritual Assemblies and in the consecration of the Bahá'í youth; the positive impression of the Faith which has been conveyed, not only to the generality of the population, but also to leaders of thought and people of influence; and the composition of your nations, which have welcomed to their shores immigrants, students and refugees from all parts of the planet, drawn from all the major racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of humanity. You, who live in a continent described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "the land wherein the splendours of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, the home of the righteous, and the gathering-place of the free," are called upon to take full advantage of these favourable circumstances.

Dear Friends, now must you commit yourselves to the work of the Cause afresh, liberated from any doubts, uncertainties or hesitations which may have impeded you in the past. Every stratum of society must be brought within your embrace, as you vigorously advance toward the goal of entry by troops at this time when powerful spiritual forces are at work in the hearts of the people. Neither the affluent nor the indigent should be excluded from your purview. Receptive souls should be sought in the sophisticated circles of urban society, on the campuses of colleges and universities, in centres of industry and commerce, on the farms and villages of the mountains, plains and prairies—wherever are to found human beings in search of the divine Truth. You should strive to create a Bahá'í community which will offer to the entire world a vibrant model of unity in diversity. The influence of your exertions can extend well beyond the confines of North America; in particular, French Canadian believers can perform an invaluable service to the Faith in the French-speaking nations and islands throughout the world, the Bahá'ís dwelling in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions can powerfully reinforce the work of the Cause in the circumpolar areas, and the friends of Hispanic background have fertile fields before them throughout Latin America. Let all believers consider the extent to which they can use familial and ethnic ties to other regions of the world for the fulfillment of the

global mission conferred on the recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

At this critical hour in the fortunes of humanity, our eyes turn with eagerness and hope to the Bahá'ís of all parts of North America, who constitute a reservoir of human and material resources unmatched elsewhere in the Bahá'í world. As you proceed along your prescribed path, you should be ever mindful of these words addressed to you by the Author of the Tablets of the Divine Plan: "I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements. The hope which 'Abdu'l-Bahá cherishes for you is that the same success which has attended your efforts in America may crown your endeavours in other parts of the world, that through you the fame of the Cause of God may be diffused throughout the East and the West, and the advent of the Kingdom of the Lord of Hosts be proclaimed in all the five continents of the globe."

Our ardent prayers at the Sacred Threshold will surround and accompany you at every step of the momentous undertaking to which you are now summoned.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996–WESTERN AND CENTRAL ASIA

The Universal House of Justice

April 1996

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Western and Central Asia

Dearly loved Friends,

As a turbulent yet luminous century draws to a close, the Bahá'í community is embarking on another campaign in the progressive unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The global enterprises thus far executed by the consecrated adherents of His Cause have systematically spread the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to every corner of the earth and have firmly established the institutions of His Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan, whose primary aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is being launched at a time when the Cause of God has emerged from obscurity, when its contributions to society are being increasingly acknowledged, and when humanity's prolonged and continuous suffering has created an atmosphere of search for spiritual values and has raised the level of receptivity to the Cause.

We call upon our much-loved coworkers in the western and central parts of the Asiatic continent, the home of the oldest and most venerable Bahá'í communities, to rally round their divinely ordained institutions and to arise during these years to demonstrate once again the devotion, valor and determination which have already conferred matchless distinction upon them. You have the honor of serving the Faith in a region above whose horizon the dawn of the Great Day of

the Lord appeared, in whose bosom the infant Cause of God was nurtured, on whose soil so much sacred blood was shed, on whose western shores the Qiblih of the people of Bahá is established, within whose embrace the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was raised, and from which hosts of devoted and committed Bahá'ís have, in the past decades, set out to bear the banner of the Faith to every part of the globe.

Our thoughts turn first to the community of Bahá'u'lláh's lovers in the land where His Faith was born. Although they are still denied the freedom to resume direct participation in the series of campaigns by which the Cause is steadily advancing throughout the world, their achievements constitute irrefutable proof of the creative power of the daily sacrifices they are making for the vindication of the Faith. What is becoming apparent, as this new global Plan opens, is that the build-up of spiritual strength within the Iranian Bahá'í community—purified by suffering and steeled by adversity—represents a reservoir of energy that will, in God's good time, bring incalculable benefits to the Cause. “Say: The springs that sustain the life of these birds are not of this world. Their source is far above the reach and ken of human apprehension.”

In the lands to the south and west of Iran, Bahá'ís live under restrictions which prevent them from teaching the Cause to their fellow-countrymen. Yet, by the outstanding contributions they have made to the progress of the Faith in other parts of the world, they have proved that their enthusiasm to spread the Divine Message cannot be dampened. It has been particularly heartening to witness the eagerness and rapidity with which, as soon as the barriers to teaching in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus were removed, they rushed to the aid of the small bands of believers who had persevered there for so many decades and helped them to build the vibrant communities now flourishing in these regions today. No doubt they will continue to lend valuable assistance to the communities in Central Asia and the Caucasus during the Four Year Plan.

In these republics, through the combined efforts of native and visiting teachers, extraordinary advances can be expected. A pattern for the rapid growth of the Cause has already been established in the region: locality after locality has been opened to the Faith and, because of the high receptivity of the people, the number of believers in each place has quickly risen, resulting in the election of a Spiritual Assembly to guide the affairs of the nascent community. Integral to this pattern, almost from the very outset, has been the holding of regular institute courses, which have assisted the friends in becoming strong promoters of the Cause. If the expansion and consolidation activities are vigorously pursued according to this same pattern in the coming years, the growth of the Faith will accelerate, greatly increasing the number of believers and centres.

To effect such accelerated growth, the friends in these countries must become so deepened in their understanding of the Faith as to take up, on their own initiative, the torch of guidance that will enlighten the multitudes. They should not be content with small communities, nor allow the tasks of administering their own community affairs to divert them from the essential purpose of bringing new members into their ranks. Each community, from the earliest phases of its development, should be fired by a vision of the glory of the Cause and imbued with the zeal to achieve rapid and sustained expansion both in the locality itself and in the nearby towns and villages.

In Pakistan, where a well-grounded community traces its roots back some hundred years, the friends must make a mighty effort to increase their numbers significantly among people of every walk of life. The will and determination needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation can be created through a consistent and widespread institute program aimed at exposing growing contingents of believers to the Creative Word, thus enhancing their spiritual capacities to diffuse the light of the Faith and to further the development of its institutions. Such a rapid process of growth requires that more and more women be enabled to move to the forefront of Bahá'í activity, in both the teaching and administrative fields. While rising to the challenge of entry by troops in their homeland, the friends in Pakistan need also to pay special attention to

their long-suffering Afghan neighbors, who cry out for the Healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh, the one true balm for their afflictions.

In all your countries, you must continue to give the highest priority to the education of children. Having seen the effects of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on generation after generation, you well understand the value of Bahá'í education and of a proper spiritual upbringing. In those areas where activities are restricted, you are nevertheless able to teach the children of your own communities and help them to grow to become pillars of strength. In other areas, you have the possibility, nay the obligation, to open your classes to children of non-Bahá'í families and to become known as the educators of the coming generations of your peoples.

Dear Friends, the time is short, and weighty responsibilities have been placed on the shoulders of each and every Bahá'í. In His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Blessed Beauty states:

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and will aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.

Be confident that your dedicated services will, like a magnet, attract the promised confirmations and that your hearts will be gladdened as you witness the successive triumphs of the Cause you hold so dear. We shall remember all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá'u'lláh to guide and assist you, as you face the many challenges of these spiritually potent closing years of the century.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1997

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1997

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We acclaim with grateful hearts the eager response on all continents to the Four Year Plan launched last Riḍván.

Consultations of the Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies started an extensive planning process, also involving Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Through such a process the national and regional character of the derivative plans took shape. But this world-encompassing exercise did more than yield distinctive schemes for the different countries; it also boosted the collaborative relationship of the two arms of the Administrative Order, a most welcome portent of the victories yet to come.

A sign of the immediate impact of the Plan was the speed with which steps were taken to establish nearly two hundred training institutes during the last twelve months. Many of these have gone far beyond the point of designing their organization; they are actually in operation and have offered their first courses. Moreover, in the movement of homefront and international pioneers and traveling teachers; in the increased attention given by individuals to deputizing

teachers; in the preparations made to ensure the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies only on the first day of Ridván; in the increasing endeavors to hold regular devotional meetings; in the widening efforts to make use of the arts in the teaching work and community activities—in all these respects could be discerned the friends' keen awareness of the importance of concentrating on the requirements of the major aim of the Plan, which is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.

Nor can we neglect to recognize other developments during the past year which confirmed the high merit of the manifold efforts being exerted by our world community and the results being achieved. Among these, to mention a few, were: the acquisition of the apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoëns in Paris where the beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, resided during His historic visit to the city; the special session on 14 August of the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Brazil to mark the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith into that country—a unique, official occasion at which Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum was present as the honored guest; the launching last July of the Bahá'í International Community's site on the World Wide Web, entitled "The Bahá'í World," which to date has received from more than 90 countries and territories over 50,000 visits, averaging some 200 per day.

Hardly outpaced by such accomplishments, the construction projects on Mount Carmel maintained a dazzling momentum highlighted by the completion of the marble colonnade of the Centre for the Study of the Texts, by the rise of the International Teaching Centre building towards its seventh level, and by the ongoing emergence of the far-stretching features of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. In this connection must be mentioned the partial lowering of the section of the public road over which the line of terraces will pass, and the acquisition and subsequent demolition of the building at the foot of the mountain which stood as the last obstruction that had to be overcome to make possible the completion of the lower terraces through which the glorious pathway rises up towards the sacred Edifice and beyond it to the crest of the Hill of God.

Also of acute relevance to the progress thus described was the maintenance of a level of contributions to the Arc Projects Fund which fulfilled the goal for the last year. Clearly, the financial demands in this regard are being met with incessant heroism by rich and poor alike, and must be sustained over the remaining years. At the same time, however, a parallel effort, equally strenuous and sustained, should be simultaneously exerted by the Assemblies and friends throughout the world to fill the critical needs of the Bahá'í International Fund.

Such an auspicious beginning to the Four Year Plan as has been experienced cannot but inspire confidence in the hearts of the members of our worldwide community that they are fully equipped to execute its requirements as outlined in the messages that launched it, and as elaborated in the plans adopted by their respective Assemblies. A further and especially appreciated encouragement as we enter this second year is that circumstances have made it feasible for the reestablishment this Ridván of the National Spiritual Assembly of Rwanda. This victory over crisis will bring to 175 the number of National Spiritual Assemblies that will be eligible to participate in the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention to be held next Ridván at the Bahá'í World Centre. How dearly we hope that by then, at the very midpoint of the Plan, the Bahá'í world will have made a major leap forward in the multiplication of its human resources, the maturation of its Spiritual Assemblies, and the evolution of its local communities!

The opportunity offered by the brief span of time before the century ends is precious beyond all telling. Only a united and sustained effort by the friends everywhere to advance the process of entry by troops can befit such a historic moment. Responsibilities urgent and inescapable press upon every institution, every member of a community striving towards its God-promised destiny. As there is only a short period in which to achieve a great deal, no time must be spared, no opportunity lost. Rest assured, dear friends, that the hosts of the Abhá Kingdom stand ready to rush to the support of anyone who will arise to offer his or her acts of service to the unfolding, spiritual drama of these momentous days.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1998

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1998

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this halfway mark in the Four Year Plan, we affirm with uplifted hearts that the worldwide Bahá'í community is breaking new ground at a dynamic stage in its evolution. The process of entry by troops, upon which its energies are focused, is clearly advancing.

Three developments brighten our expectations. One is in the solid results being produced wherever training institutes are in operation. Tens of thousands of individuals have over the last two years completed at least one institute course. The immediate effects upon them have been a greatly strengthened faith, a more conscious spiritual identity, and a deepened commitment to Bahá'í service. The second pertains to the notable improvement in the conditions affecting the establishment and renewal of Local Spiritual Assemblies. The decision to form these institutions only on the first day of Riḍván, and to do so principally at the initiative of the communities to which they belong, was put into effect in 1997. While there was an immediate but not unexpected drop in the number of Local Assemblies worldwide, the decrease was not very large; in fact, increases were recorded in some countries. This outcome indicates that the process of maturation of these divinely ordained institutions is on course. The third is that a new confidence in teaching is stirring

the friends, yielding impressive results in various regions. The potential for a steady and ever-expanding influx of new believers has always been great, and we are able to say with assurance that the capacity to actualize it is methodically being developed more than ever before with the prosecution of the current Plan.

Further to these signs of progress, we are gratified by the marvelous speed with which the construction projects on Mount Carmel proceeded to fulfill the schedule which had been set for the year just ended. Immediately ahead are the establishment in May of three new National Spiritual Assemblies—Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia—and the reestablishment of the National Spiritual Assembly in Liberia, raising to 179 the pillars of the Universal House of Justice. In contemplating the divine favors being bestowed on our community, we acknowledge with deep gratitude the constancy of the acts of service being performed by the individual Hands of the Cause of God, by the International Teaching Centre, and by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries on all continents. The increasing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies also bolsters our certitude in the imminence of resounding victories.

Against this salutary picture of the community's prospects is the confused background of a planet at odds with itself. And yet, amid the widespread desolation of the human spirit, it is apparent that at some level of consciousness there is among the peoples of the world a growing sense of an irresistible movement towards global unity and peace. This sense is being aroused as the physical barriers between peoples are being virtually eliminated by breathtaking advances in science and technology. Nevertheless, a mixed catalogue of world-shaking tribulations and world-shaping developments keeps humanity concurrently dazed and dazzled. The storms and stresses battering the social fabric are incomprehensible to all except the relatively few of the planet's inhabitants who recognize God's purpose for this Day.

Our fellow human beings everywhere are insensibly subjected at one and the same time to the conflicting emotions incited by the continuous operation of simultaneous processes of "rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos." These Shoghi

Effendi identified as aspects of the Major Plan and Minor Plan of God, the two known ways in which His purpose for humankind is going forward. The Major Plan is associated with turbulence and calamity and proceeds with an apparent, random disorderliness, but is, in fact, inexorably driving humanity towards unity and maturity. Its agency for the most part is the people who are ignorant of its course and even antagonistic towards its aim. As Shoghi Effendi has pointed out, God's Major Plan uses "both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfillment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth." The acceleration of the processes it generates is lending impetus to developments which, with all the initial pain and heartache attributable to them, we Bahá'ís see as signs of the emergence of the Lesser Peace.

Unlike His Major Plan, which works mysteriously, God's Minor Plan is clearly delineated, operates according to orderly and well-known processes, and has been given to us to execute. Its ultimate goal is the Most Great Peace. The four-year-long campaign, at the mid-point of which we have arrived, constitutes the current stage in the Minor Plan. It is to the achievement of its purpose that we must all devote our attention and energies.

At times it may seem that the operation of the Major Plan causes a disruption in the work of the Minor Plan, but the friends have every reason to remain undismayed. For they recognize the source of the recurrent turbulence at play in the world and, in the words of our Guardian, "acknowledge its necessity, observe confidently its mysterious processes, ardently pray for the mitigation of its severity, intelligently labor to assuage its fury, and anticipate, with undimmed vision, the consummation of the fears and the hopes it must necessarily engender."

Even a cursory survey of the global scene in recent years cannot but lead to observations fraught with special significance for a Bahá'í viewer. For one thing, amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistakable trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the greater involvement of the

United Nations, with the backing of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies—a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of an organically unified world. But a development of even greater moment to the Bahá'í community is that a massive number of people are searching for spiritual truth. Several recently published studies have been devoted to this phenomenon. The ideologies that dominated the larger part of this century have been exhausted; at their waning in the century's closing years, a hunger for meaning, a yearning of the soul, is on the rise.

This spiritual hunger is characterized by a restlessness, by a swelling dissatisfaction with the moral state of society; it is also evident in the upsurge of fundamentalism among various religious sects, and in the multiplication of new movements posing as religions or aspiring to take the place of religion. Here are observations that enable one to appreciate the interaction between the two divinely propelled processes at work on the planet. The manifold opportunities thus providentially provided to present the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to searching souls create a dynamic situation for the Bahá'í teacher. The implications for the task at hand are immensely encouraging.

Our hopes, our goals, our possibilities of moving forward can all be realized through concentrating our endeavors on the major aim of the Divine Plan at its current stage—that is, to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This challenge can be met through persistent effort patiently pursued. Entry by troops is a possibility well within the grasp of our community. Unremitting faith, prayer, the promptings of the soul, Divine assistance—these are among the essentials of progress in any Bahá'í undertaking. But also of vital importance to bringing about entry by troops is a realistic approach, systematic action. There are no shortcuts. Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical,

efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.

Towards ensuring an orderly evolution of the community, a function of Bahá'í institutions is to organize and maintain a process of developing human resources whereby Bahá'ís, new and veteran alike, can acquire the knowledge and capacity to sustain a continuous expansion and consolidation of the community. The establishment of training institutes is critical to such effort, since they are centres through which large numbers of individuals can acquire and improve their ability to teach and administer the Faith. Their existence underscores the importance of knowledge of the Faith as a source of power for invigorating the life of the Bahá'í community and of the individuals who compose it.

The facts at hand confirm that the Four Year Plan works where a systematic approach is understood and applied. These same facts show that the institutions of the Faith, in their collaborative efforts at national, regional, and local levels, have clearly been adhering to this understanding. However, with individuals, on whom rests the ultimate success of the Plan, this understanding is less clear. For this reason, we must emphasize to our fellow-believers the importance to their individual effort of this prerequisite of success in teaching and in other undertakings.

As translated into programs and projects by national and local institutions, the Plan, among other things, gives direction, identifies goals, stimulates effort, provides a variety of needed facilities and materials to benefit the work of teachers and administrators. This is of course necessary for the proper functioning of the community, but is of no consequence unless its individual members respond through active participation. In so responding, each individual, too, must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá'í.

But beyond the necessity of responding to the call of the institutions, the individual is charged by Bahá'u'lláh Himself with the sacred duty of teaching His Cause, described by Him as the “most meritorious of all deeds.”

So long as there are souls in need of enlightenment, this duty must surely remain the constant occupation of every believer. In its fulfillment, the individual is directly responsible to Bahá'u'lláh. “Let him not wait for any directions,” Shoghi Effendi urgently advises, “or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies.” The writings of the Central Figures and of our Guardian are replete with advice and exhortations concerning the individual's irreplaceable role in the advancement of the Cause. So it is inevitable that we should feel impelled, at this particular time in the life of humanity as a whole, to appeal directly to each member of our community to ponder the urgent situation facing us all as the helpers of the Abhá Beauty.

Our lot, dear brothers and sisters, is to be consciously involved in a vast historic process the like of which has not ever before been experienced by any people. As a global community, we have, thus far, attained a unique and magnificent success in being representative of the full spectrum of the human race—thanks to the inestimable expenditure of life, effort and treasure willingly made by thousands of our spiritual forebears. There is no other aggregation of human beings who can claim to have raised up a system with the demonstrated capacity to unite all of God's children in one world-embracing Order. This achievement places us not only in a position of incomparable strength, but more particularly in one of inescapable responsibility. Does not every one of us therefore have a divine obligation to fulfill, a sacred duty to perform towards every other one who is not yet aware of the call of God's latest Manifestation? Time does not stop, does not wait. With every passing hour a fresh affliction strikes at a distracted humanity. Dare we linger?

In a mere two years the Four Year Plan will be concluded, just some months before the end of an unforgettable century. Looming before us, then, is a twofold date with destiny. In extolling the unprecedented potential of the twentieth century, the beloved Master averred that its traces will last forever. Seized with such a vision, the mind of the alert follower of the Blessed Beauty must undoubtedly be astir with anxious questions as to what part he or she will play in these few fleeting years, and as to whether he or she will, at the end of this seminal period, have made a mark among those enduring traces which the mind of the Master perceived. To ensure a soul-satisfying answer, one thing above all else is necessary: to act, to act now, and to continue to act.

Our heartfelt plea at the Holy Threshold on behalf of us all is that we may be divinely aided and richly confirmed in whatever we do towards meeting the urgent aim of the Divine Plan at so fate-laden a moment in human history.

The Universal House of Justice

April 1999

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 1999

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Our hearts are aglow with hope as we survey what has been accomplished in the year preceding the fateful, final stretch toward the consummation of the Four Year Plan. From the year's momentous beginning with the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention, the Bahá'í world has sustained a rising pace of activity that has significantly advanced the process of entry by troops. Our community has grown appreciably, its human resources have been richly enhanced. From projects of expansion to endeavors at consolidation, from social and economic development to external affairs, from services of the youth to expressions in the arts, from the World Centre of the Faith to remote villages and towns—in fact, from whatever angle the community is viewed—progress has been made. The prospects for the Plan are impelling.

The momentum generated at the International Convention pervaded the Counsellors' Conference that immediately followed it, further galvanizing the indefatigable participants; and it charged the proceedings of the National Conventions held in May, including those of Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia which met for the first time to form their National Spiritual Assemblies. That same energy infused the International Teaching Centre, which has been displaying a remarkable potency in the short time since its sixth term began on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. Concentrating on refining and consolidating their organization, the Counsellor members have

refrained from their usual travels during this first year, but they can be expected after this to resume their visits to various parts of the world, so as to reinforce their vitalizing influence on the successful conclusion of the Four Year Plan.

Further to these happenings in the Holy Land, the construction projects on Mount Carmel, beheld with such thrilling astonishment by the delegates to the International Convention, press onward towards their scheduled completion at the end of the century. With the opening since last Ridván of all remaining areas of construction, the speed of work has reached a new peak. The Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the Archives Building are being readied for occupancy within a few weeks; the exterior of the International Teaching Centre building is fully clad in marble, while finishing work at all levels of its interior is proceeding. The lowering of Hatzionut Avenue, to accommodate the bridge which now connects the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb on both sides of the road, has been completed and normal traffic restored. The unfolding magnificence of the Terraces has so captured public attention that the nineteenth terrace at the top of the mountain has already been opened to visitors on a daily schedule, evoking the enthusiastic response of a grateful populace. As part of a campaign to attract international attention to the city, the Municipality of Haifa has published a pictorial brochure on the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces, available in five major languages besides Hebrew.

We feel compelled to mention at least two other developments at the World Centre of a wholly different order: First, the decision to raise the number of pilgrims in each group to 150 from 100—this to take effect when the revamping, now in progress, of the newly acquired building, situated across the way from the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, has been completed and use can be made of its provision of a pilgrim hall and other facilities for the administration of an expanded pilgrimage program. Second is the notable headway being made, despite the inevitable slowness of the process, in the plan to translate texts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh with a view to publishing a new English volume of His works. Effort is being devoted to providing full versions of such major Tablets as the Súriy-i-Mulúk and the Súriy-i-Haykal, as well as complete texts of Tablets

addressed to individual kings and rulers. Also scheduled for inclusion are the Súriy-i-Ra'ís, the Lawh-i-Ra'ís and the Lawh-i-Fu'ád.

The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh marches on resistlessly, quickened by the increasing application of an approach to the development and use of human resources that is systematic. The further creation of national and regional training institutes, now numbering 344, has pressed this development forward, with the result that, apart from North America and Iran where numerous courses have been given, some 70,000 individuals have already completed at least one institute course. All of this is contributing to a growing body of confirmed, active supporters of the Cause. The untold potential of this progression is illustrated in such reports as the one received from Chad, where in an area served by an institute more than 1,000 people embraced the Faith through the individual efforts of those who had received training. Understanding of the necessity for systematization in the development of human resources is everywhere taking hold.

Collateral with the demonstrated efficacy of training institutes is the pragmatic emergence of Regional Bahá'í Councils in selected countries where conditions have made the establishment of these institutions necessary and viable. Where there is close interaction between a Council and a training institute, the stage is set for a galvanic coherence of the processes effecting expansion and consolidation in a region, and for the practical matching of the training services of institutes to the developmental needs of local communities. Moreover, the operational guidelines whereby the Continental Counsellors and the Regional Councils have direct access to each other give rise to a further institutional relationship which, along with that connecting the Councils to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, effectuates a dynamic integration of functions at the regional level.

The ever-expanding work in social and economic development is also benefiting from the operation of those training institutes that give attention to such subjects as literacy, primary health care and the advancement of women. The more widespread efforts of the Office of Social and Economic Development to promote a global process of

learning about relevant Bahá'í principles are enhanced by the work of these institutes, as well as by the rise of Bahá'í-inspired organizations scattered throughout the planet. Clearly, then, the institutional capacity to administer development programs is gaining in strength. This is apparent in projects sponsored by Bahá'í institutions or initiated by individuals through the inspiration of the Faith. An outstanding example of the latter is Unity College, which was created by a family in Ethiopia as the first, and since late 1998, the only private college in the country, with a student body that swelled to 5,000 during this past year. Another example, on a smaller scale but of significance nonetheless, is the initiative taken by a family in Buffalo, New York: here, in their home, they have been assisting tens of children and youth from the inner city to develop, through Bahá'í spiritual and moral teachings, patterns of behavior that will enable them to overcome self-destructive attitudes bred by poverty and racism.

In the area of external affairs, the most energetic actions have been prompted by two tragic happenings in Iran. The sudden execution in Mashhad last July of Mr. Rúhu'lláh Rawhání, the first such official action in six years, registered a shock that provoked a worldwide and unprecedented outcry by governments and United Nations agencies. In late September the government's intelligence agency launched an organized attack on the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, involving the arrest of 36 members of the faculty and raids on more than 500 homes across the country. The latter incident inspired a global campaign of protest, still in progress, in which academic institutions and associations, educators, and student groups have been participating, and in which the press has taken a special interest, as reflected in the appearance of substantial articles in *Le Monde*, *The New York Times* and other major newspapers. The successful passage in the United Nations General Assembly last December of yet another resolution on Iran, in which the Bahá'ís are distinctly mentioned, must surely have been influenced by these two conspicuous manifestations of an unrelenting religious persecution.

But intensive as has been the demand upon the friends in all parts of the world to defend our beleaguered brethren, much attention was devoted as well to a wide range of external affairs endeavors. The

four-month-long mission undertaken by an emissary of the House of Justice, Mr. Giovanni Ballerio, to islands of the Pacific Ocean where he met with 22 heads of state, 5 heads of government and more than 40 other high-ranking officials; the efforts pursued by a number of National Assemblies, at the urging of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, to promote human rights education; the participation, by invitation, of representatives of South Africa's Bahá'í community in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at which they were able to recount their record of unflinching support of racial unity throughout the years of apartheid; the recent success of communities in Australia, Brazil, Finland and Portugal in obtaining the decision of educational authorities to include courses on the Bahá'í Faith in the curricula of primary and secondary schools—these, not to mention the public information projects that generated publicity through all forms of the media, are examples of the broadly based enterprises in external affairs that engaged the energies of the community.

A corollary spate of activities involved the use of the arts, of which the musical and other artistic performances associated with the celebration in Paris of the centenary of the establishment of the Faith in Europe were an outstanding instance. The Voices of Bahá Choir, composed of 68 members drawn from Europe and the Americas, delighted audiences in eight European cities and introduced the Faith to many. "Light and Fire," the completed part of an opera/ballet being written by Bahá'í composer Lasse Thoresen of Norway, was successfully performed last September at the prestigious music festival in Poland known as the Warsaw Autumn, which was opened by the Queen of Sweden. The work is based on recent heroic acts of the martyrs in Iran, a fact that exposed the audience to knowledge of the Faith. Europe's apparent lead in these particular endeavors was also marked by the occasion of the Austrian Chamber Music Festival when the Austrian Cross for Sciences and Arts, the highest award of its kind for Austria, was presented by the President of the Republic to Mr. Bijan Khadem-Missagh, a Bahá'í violinist and conductor. A program at that same Festival featured the recitation of extracts from Bahá'í and other sacred scriptures. But a word, too, must be said in recognition of the prominent part being played by youth all over the world in their employment of the arts in the teaching work; renditions

by their dance workshops, in particular, have acquired renown within and outside the Bahá'í community.

We therefore enter this Ridván season, as a community in a dynamic state of transformation, enjoying a coherence of vision and activity consonant with the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. And we begin the final year of the Plan with a boost in administrative strength, as three countries in Europe—Latvia, Lithuania and Macedonia—convoke their first Conventions to form National Spiritual Assemblies and thus raise the number of pillars of The Universal House of Justice to 182. But beyond this festive moment is a chronology of expectations that lists, first and foremost, the conclusion of the Four Year Plan at Ridván 2000. This will be followed by the commencement on the Day of the Covenant of that very year of a new term of office for the Continental Boards of Counsellors, whose members will soon thereafter be called to the Bahá'í World Centre for a conference at which, among other matters, the features of the next global teaching and consolidation plan will be discussed. The Counsellors' Conference will mark the occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its permanent seat, an occasion for which Auxiliary Board members throughout the world will be invited to join the Counsellors in the Holy Land. The Mount Carmel projects will have been completed by this time and the preparations will have been well advanced for dedicatory events, scheduled to take place on 22 and 23 May 2001, to which a number of representatives from each national Bahá'í community will be invited. The details concerning these events are to be announced in due course.

This projection of portentous happenings cuts across the divide in time between the twentieth century and the new millennium, according to the reckoning of the common era. It is a projection that underscores the contrast between the confident vision that propels the constructive endeavors of an illumined community and the tangled fears seizing the millions upon millions who are as yet unaware of the Day in which they are living. Bereft of authentic guidance, they dwell on the horrors of the century, despairing over what these could imply for the future, hardly appreciating that this very century contains a light that will be shed on centuries to come. Ill-equipped to interpret the social commotion at play throughout the planet, they listen to the

pundits of error and sink deeper into a slough of despond. Troubled by forecasts of doom, they do battle with the phantoms of a wrongly informed imagination. Knowing nothing of the transformative vision vouchsafed by the Lord of the Age, they stumble ahead, blind to the peerlessness of the new Day of God.

The pitiful conditions implied by such a state of heart and mind cannot but prompt us all to action, unabating action, to fulfill the intentions of a Plan whose major aim is to accelerate that process which will make it possible for growing numbers of the world's people to find the Object of their quest and thus to build a united, peaceful and prosperous life.

Dear Friends: The days pass swiftly as the twinkle of a star. Make your mark now, at this crucial turning point of a juncture, the like of which shall never return. Make that mark in deeds that will ensure for you celestial blessings—guarantee for you, for the entire race, a future beyond any earthly reckoning.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2000

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2000

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We bow our heads in gratitude to the Lord of Hosts, our hearts brimming with joy, as we witness how marvelous a difference four years have made since the launching of the global Plan now concluded at this Festival of Splendors. So marked was the progress achieved during this period that our world community attained heights from which bright new horizons for its future exploits can clearly be discerned.

The quantitative difference resulted mainly from a more critical qualitative difference. The culture of the Bahá'í community experienced a change. This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community. That is so because the friends concerned themselves more consistently with deepening their knowledge of the divine Teachings and learned much—and this more systematically than before—about how to apply them to promulgating the Cause, to managing their individual and collective activities, and to working with their neighbors. In a word, they entered into a learning mode from which purposeful action was pursued. The chief propellant of this change was the system of

training institutes established throughout the world with great rapidity—an accomplishment which, in the field of expansion and consolidation, qualifies as the single greatest legacy of the Four Year Plan.

In the increased capacity of individuals to teach the Faith, as shown in the thrust of individual initiatives; in the improved ability of Spiritual Assemblies, Councils and committees to guide the endeavors of the friends; in the introduction of new patterns of thought and action which influenced the collective behavior of the local community—in all such respects the system of training institutes demonstrated its indispensability as an engine of the process of entry by troops. By extending their operation through local study circles, many institutes magnified their capacity to cover wide regions with their programs. Mongolia, for instance, set up 106 study circles and, as a result, recorded a significant rise in the number of new believers. Concurrent with these kinds of developments, the members of our worldwide community also gave more attention to drawing on the power of prayer, to meditating on the sacred Word, and to deriving the spiritual benefits of participation in devotional gatherings. It is through the workings of these elements of an intensified individual and collective transformation that the size of the community is increasing. Although the number of new believers has as yet only slightly surpassed those of recent years, it is immensely gratifying to see that this increase is now geographically widespread, is engaging ever-larger segments of the community, and is successful in integrating new declarants into the life of the Cause.

So salutary, so promising a condition of the Faith also owes much, beyond measure, to the advisory influence, collaborative role and practical work of the institution of the Counsellors which were amplified with respect to the formation and operation of institutes—an amplification that reflected the timely stimulation imparted by a vibrant and ever alert International Teaching Centre.

The central theme of the Four Year Plan—that of advancing the process of entry by troops—produced a high degree of integration of thought and action. It focused attention on a major stage of the

evolution of the Bahá'í community that must be attained during the Formative Age; for until entry by troops is more widely sustained, the conditions will not be ripe for mass conversion, that breakthrough promised by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. The thematic focus of the Plan bore implications for all categories of Bahá'í activity; it called for a clarity of understanding which made possible systematic and strategic planning as a prerequisite of individual and collective action. The members of the community came gradually to appreciate how systematization would facilitate the processes of growth and development. This raising of consciousness was a huge step that led to an upgrading of teaching activities and a change in the culture of the community.

The integrative aspects of the theme were evident in the efforts at planning, building institutional capacity, and developing human resources. The threads connecting all these can be traced from the outset of the Plan to its very end. The December 1995 Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors in the Holy Land marked the beginning. There the Counsellors were oriented to the features of the Plan. This was followed by their consultations with National Spiritual Assemblies in national planning sessions that moved subsequently to the regional level, involving Auxiliary Board members, Local Spiritual Assemblies and committees. Thus, at all levels, elements of the Bahá'í administration became involved in the planning process, and reached beyond this stage to that of implementation, at which the institutional capacity to cope with entry by troops had to be created. Two major steps were taken in this regard: one was the establishment of training institutes; the other was the formal establishment and widespread introduction of Regional Bahá'í Councils as a feature of the administration between the local and national levels to strengthen the administrative capacity of certain communities where the growing complexity of the issues facing National Spiritual Assemblies required this development. Equally of relevance to integrating the essentials of the process were the strategies defined for the work in social and economic development, which is a critical part of consolidation, and in external affairs, which is a vital factor in enabling the Faith to manage the consequences of its emergence from obscurity. The combined effect produced resounding results, the enumeration of which would far exceed the compass of these pages.

We are moved, however, to cite certain highlights that illustrate the scope of the Plan's achievements.

In the Holy Land, the construction of the Terraces and the buildings on the Arc forged ahead with every assurance of meeting the announced deadline for their completion at the end of this Gregorian year. Moreover, the building in Haifa to which we referred in our last Riḍván message in connection with the expanded size of pilgrimage groups is ready for use as of this Riḍván. In this same connection, architectural plans were approved for the much-needed facility to be built at Bahjí to accommodate pilgrims and other Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í visitors. The translation of the Texts for the expected new volume of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings has been completed and preparations are under way for its publication.

Strides in expansion and consolidation were manifest in ways other than those already mentioned: in pioneering, proclamation, the publication of literature, the use of the arts, the formation of Spiritual Assemblies, and advances of Bahá'í studies associations. Some 3,300 believers settled as long- and short-term international pioneers. That many countries usually on the receiving end had themselves dispatched pioneers abroad was a further indication of the maturation of national communities. True to the mandate addressed to their members, the Canadian and United States communities excelled in the number of pioneers that left their shores and in the much greater number of traveling teachers, including a significant representation of youth. Especially noteworthy, too, was the heartening response of believers of African descent in the United States to the call that Bahá'í teachers travel to Africa.

Proclamation of the Cause involved a variety of actions which included the sponsoring of a wide range of occasions—anniversaries, commemorations, discussion groups, exhibits, and the like—that made it possible for large numbers of people to become acquainted with the teachings of the Faith. The Houses of Worship were magnetic centres for visitors who entered their doors in increasing numbers, especially in India, where some five million people were received during the last year. Added to such activities were the multiple uses of the media to

get the Bahá'í message across. In the United States, some 60,000 inquirers responded to a media campaign designed by the National Teaching Committee. Worldwide, knowledge of the Faith was spread through the appearance, more frequently than before, of unsolicited, sympathetic articles in the print media. There was a similar broadening of exposure through readiness on the part of radio and television stations to include regular Bahá'í programs; this was so in such countries as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia. Such fortunate developments were crowned by the independent choice of international media establishments to use the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces as the site for the telecast of the Holy Land's segment of the worldwide media program celebrating the arrival of the year 2000.

The use of the arts became an important feature in the proclamation, teaching, deepening and devotional activities of the worldwide community. The arts attracted young people, who applied them to their teaching and deepening activities principally through the numerous drama and dance workshops active in many parts of the world. But the dynamics of the arts went far beyond singing and dancing to involve a range of imaginative activities that grounded people in the Cause. Where folk art was used, particularly in Africa, the teaching work was greatly enhanced. For example, Ghana and Liberia each mounted a Light of Unity Project for promoting the arts in teaching. In India, the Communal Harmony Group had a similar purpose.

Mostly at the urging of the Counsellors and with the support of the Continental Fund, a boost was given to the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature especially in Africa and Asia. Moreover, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas appeared in a complete Arabic edition and in other languages.

While the restriction of the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies to the first day of Ridván, which took effect in 1997, produced the anticipated decrease in the number of these institutions, the fall was not drastic. The number has since held its ground and a sound process of consolidation is in place. Seven new pillars of the Universal House

of Justice were raised up, bringing the total of National Spiritual Assemblies to 181.

Particularly gratifying has been the gathering momentum, during these four years, of Bahá'í scholarly activity, which forged ahead with the vital task of reinforcing the intellectual foundations of the Faith's work. Two invaluable results have been the impressive enrichment of Bahá'í literature and the production of a body of dissertations examining various contemporary problems in the light of Bahá'í principles. The network of Associations of Bahá'í Studies, celebrating this year its twenty-fifth anniversary, welcomed five new affiliates during the Plan. Reflective of the diversity and creativity that this field of service is attracting were the holding of Papua New Guinea's first Bahá'í studies conference and the Japanese Association's ground-breaking focus on the spiritual origins of traditional Japanese scholarship.

Progress in the field of social and economic development was decidedly qualitative, although figures showing an increase of projects were also impressive. Annually reported activities grew from some 1,600 at the beginning of the Plan to more than 1,900 nearing its end. The movement towards a more systematic approach remained the dominant characteristic of the work during this period. To promote consultation and action on the principles of social and economic development, the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre sponsored 13 regional seminars in which an estimated 700 representatives from 60 countries participated. This Office also attended to the devising of pilot projects and materials suitable for the mounting of organized campaigns to foster youth empowerment and literacy, community health worker training, the advancement of women, and moral education. An example was the program in Guyana that trained more than 1,500 literacy facilitators; another was the completion in Malaysia of eight modules for the advancement of women, which became the basis for training sessions held in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A plan to integrate Bahá'í radio stations with the work of training institutes was initiated in the Guaymi region of Panama. As institutes have the potential to provide training for social and economic development, a movement in that direction involved a dozen institutes, which are

currently experimenting with such efforts in areas including literacy, community health worker training, and vocational training. A number of Bahá'í-sponsored and Bahá'í-inspired agencies have devoted their energies to projects, such as the one which involved collaboration with the World Health Organization in combating river blindness in Cameroon; more than 30,000 individuals have received the needed medication through this Bahá'í project. Another instance is the private university in Ethiopia, Unity College, whose student body has risen to 8,000. Another is Landegg Academy in Switzerland, which, while expanding and consolidating its academic program, extended highly appreciated assistance in the ongoing quest for a remedy to the horrendous social consequences of conflict in the Balkans. Yet another is Núr University in Bolivia, which, in a collaborative project with Ecuador, offered training to more than 1,000 school teachers in its moral leadership program. In this field of social and economic development, such evidences of capacity building were a great benefit to the purposes of the Plan.

Guided by the external affairs strategy communicated to National Spiritual Assemblies in 1994, the community's capacity in the fields of diplomatic and public information likewise expanded at an astonishing rate, placing the Bahá'í community in a dynamic relationship with the United Nations, governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the media. The strategy focused activities at international and national levels on two key objectives: to influence the processes towards world peace, and to defend the Faith. Through the measures adopted for the defense of our dearly loved co-religionists in Iran, the Bahá'í International Community won a new measure of respect and support that created opportunities for other aims of the strategy to be pursued. To meet the challenge of the intractable situation in Iran, our institutions and external affairs agencies devised new approaches to activating available instruments of governments and the United Nations. The case of the persecutions in Iran occupied the attention of the highest authorities on the planet. Indeed, the news that an Iranian court had reaffirmed death sentences for two of the friends and imposed a similar sentence on a third evoked a sharp response from the President of the United States, who issued a clear admonition to Iran. As a consequence of the interventions of world leaders and the United Nations, the executions

of Iranian Bahá'ís virtually stopped and the number of those sentenced to long-term imprisonment was drastically reduced.

While we have welcomed these interventions, we acclaim the self-sacrificing spirit, the fortitude, and the indomitable faith of our brothers and sisters in Iran that have invested such efforts with potency. These manifest qualities of the soul baffle their compatriots as to the stamina with which they withstand the assaults so viciously and so relentlessly unloosed against them. How else could one explain that so few have been able to stand up to so many for so long? How else could they have aroused the active concern of the world when even a single one of them faces the threat of death? Iran's tragedy is that the assailants have until now failed to see that the divine principles for which these persecuted ones have sacrificed their possessions and even their lives contain the very solutions that would satisfy the yearnings of a population in its hour of discontent. But there can be no doubt whatever that the systematic tyranny to which our Iranian friends have so cruelly been subjected will ultimately yield to the Almighty Power guiding the mysterious proceedings toward their assured destiny in all its promised glory.

With regard to the other objective of the external affairs strategy, the lines of action were guided by four themes—human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. Our records show a huge step forward in the work on human rights and the status of women. With regard to the former, the United Nations Office prosecuted a creative program of human rights education which has, so far, served as a means of building the capacity of no fewer than 99 National Spiritual Assemblies for diplomatic work. Regarding the status of women, the existence of 52 national offices for the advancement of women, the contributions of numerous Bahá'í women and men to conferences and workshops at all levels, the selection of Bahá'í representatives to crucial positions on key NGO committees, including the one that serves the United Nations Development Fund for Women, show how the followers of Bahá'u'lláh assiduously promote His principle of the equality of women and men.

At the same time an array of initiatives are disseminating information about the Bahá'í Faith to various publics. These include such innovative undertakings as: the launching of "The Bahá'í World" Web site, which is already averaging 25,000 visits a month; the issuing of a statement entitled "Who Is Writing the Future?" which is helping the friends everywhere talk about contemporary issues; the airing since last November on the World Wide Web of "Payam-e-Doost," the Persian-language radio program broadcast for an hour weekly in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area—a program which is available at all times throughout the world on the Internet; and the implementation of a highly original television program, applying moral principles to day-to-day problems, which has won the warm endorsement of government authorities in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

A phenomenon that has gathered force as the century draws to its end is that the people of the world have arisen to express their aspirations through what has come to be known as the "organizations of civil society." It must be a source of great satisfaction to Bahá'ís everywhere that the Bahá'í International Community as an NGO representing a cross-section of humankind has won such trust as a unifying agent in major discussions shaping the future of humankind. Our principal representative at the United Nations was appointed to co-chair a committee of nongovernmental organizations—a position that is giving the Bahá'í International Community a leading role in the organization of the Millennium Forum. This gathering, called by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and scheduled to be held in May, will give organizations of civil society an opportunity to formulate views and recommendations on global issues which will be taken up at the subsequent Millennium Summit in September of this year to be attended by heads of state and government.

Humanity's awakening to the spiritual dimensions of the changes occurring in the world has a special significance for Bahá'ís. The interfaith dialogue has intensified. During the Four Year Plan it increasingly involved the Faith as a recognized participant. The Parliament of the World's Religions held in Cape Town last December brought together some 6,000 attendees, among whom was

a strong Bahá'í delegation. Bahá'ís served on both the South African and International Boards of Directors that planned the event. For Bahá'ís, interest in the occasion arose particularly from the fact that the first mention of the Name of Bahá'u'lláh at a public gathering in the Western Hemisphere had occurred at the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893. Two inter-religious events held in Jordan last November included Bahá'ís as invited participants: a conference on conflict and religion in the Middle East, and the annual meeting of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. Bahá'í representatives attended events in Vatican City and New Delhi sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church; on the latter occasion, in the presence of Pope John Paul II, Counsellor Zena Sorabjee was one of the representatives of religions addressing the gathering. In the United Kingdom, the Faith was placed in the public arena when Bahá'í representatives joined members of eight other major religions for an interfaith celebration of the new millennium in the Royal Gallery of Westminster Palace, where, in the presence of Royalty, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other distinguished persons, reference was made to the gathering of the "nine major religions of the United Kingdom." In Germany, for the first time Bahá'ís were included in an interfaith dialogue. This reversed a longstanding attitude of Christian denominations which had avoided contact with the Faith owing to a book written by a Covenant-breaker and issued by a Lutheran publishing house in 1981. The remedy was provided in a 600-page scholarly rebuttal written by three Bahá'ís and published in 1995 by a leading non-Bahá'í firm, representing a signal victory for the German Bahá'í community. An English translation was published in the last year of the Plan. Interfaith dialogue took an unusual form when at Lambeth Palace in 1998 representatives of the World Bank and of nine major religions held a meeting which led to the formation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. The announced aim of the Dialogue is to try to bridge the gap between the faith communities and the World Bank in order to enable them to work together more effectively to overcome world poverty. The frequency and wide embrace of interfaith gatherings represent a new phenomenon in the relations among the religions. It is apparent that the various religious communities are striving to achieve the spirit of friendliness and fellowship among themselves that Bahá'u'lláh urged His followers to show towards the followers of other religions.

The concentrated endeavor of the Bahá'í community in these four years occurred at a time when the wider society grappled with a torrent of conflicting interests. In this brief but intensely dynamic span, the forces at work in the Bahá'í community and throughout the world proceeded with relentless acceleration. In their wake were revealed more conspicuously than before the social phenomena to which Shoghi Effendi alluded. More than six decades ago, he had called attention to the "simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other." These twin processes did not continue in isolation from those specific to the Bahá'í community but at times proceeded in such a way as to invite, as has already been shown, the direct involvement of the Faith. They seemed to run at opposite sides of the same corridor of time. On one side, wars fomented by religious, political, racial or tribal conflict raged in some 40 places; sudden, total breakdown of civil order paralyzed a number of countries; terrorism as a political weapon became epidemic; a surge of international criminal networks raised alarm. Yet on the opposite side, attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá'u'lláh's prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for an international criminal court to be established, another action that accords with Bahá'í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders are scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of communications have opened the way for everyone to communicate with anyone on the planet. The economic disintegration in Asia threatened to destabilize the world economy, but it prompted efforts both to remedy the immediate situation and to find ways of bringing a sense of equity to international trade and finance. These are but a few examples of the two contrasting but interactive tendencies operating at this time, confirming Shoghi Effendi's inspired summation of the forces at work in God's greater plan, "whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

At the conclusion of these four eventful years, we have arrived at a portentous convergence of ends and beginnings in measures of Gregorian time and the Bahá'í era. In one instance, this convergence entails the wrapping up of the twentieth century and, in the other,

opens a new stage in the unfolding of the Formative Age. The perspective from these two frames of time prompts us to reflect on a vision of world-shaping trends that have synchronized, and to do so in the context of the insight so graphically projected by Shoghi Effendi at the inception of the Arc he conceived. During the course of the Plan, this vision assumed a brilliant clarity as the construction projects advanced on Mount Carmel, as world leaders took bold steps towards fashioning the structures of a global political peace, and as local and national Bahá'í institutions moved to new levels in their evolution. We carry with us a sacred and enduring memory of the twentieth century that stirs our energies even as it sets our path: It is of that seminal moment in the history of humankind when the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, during an unparalleled ministry, designed the architecture of a new World Order and when, subsequently during some of the most devastating years, the Guardian of the Faith devoted his utmost energies to raising up the structures of an Administrative System that, at the end of the century, stands before the gaze of the world in the wholeness of its essential form. We come thus to a bridge between times. The capacities developed through a century of struggle and sacrifice by a handful of intoxicated lovers of Bahá'u'lláh must now be applied to the inescapable tasks remaining to the Formative Age, whose many epochs of unremitting labor will lead to that Golden Age of our Faith when the Most Great Peace will envelop the earth.

We begin at this Ridván with a Twelve Month Plan. Brief though it is, it must and will suffice to accomplish certain vital tasks and to lay the ground for the next twenty-year thrust of the Master's Divine Plan. What was so carefully begun four years ago—the systematic acquisition of knowledge, qualities and skills of service—must be augmented. Wherever they exist, national and regional institutes must activate to the full the programs and systems they have adopted. New institutes must be formed where such needs have been identified. Greater steps must be taken to systematize the teaching work undertaken through individual initiative and institutional sponsorship. It is partly for this purpose that in several areas of each continent the Counsellors and the National Assemblies have established “Area Growth Programs.” The results will provide a body of experience for the benefit of future Plans. The individual, the institutions and the local community are urged to focus their attention on these essential

tasks, so as to be fully prepared for the five-year enterprise to begin at Ridván 2001—an enterprise that will take the Bahá'í world to the next phase in the advancement of the process of entry by troops.

But beyond giving attention to these tasks, there is a pressing challenge to be faced: Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially. Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere. The social dislocation of children in our time is a sure mark of a society in decline; this condition is not, however, confined to any race, class, nation or economic condition—it cuts across them all. It grieves our hearts to realize that in so many parts of the world children are employed as soldiers, exploited as laborers, sold into virtual slavery, forced into prostitution, made the objects of pornography, abandoned by parents centred on their own desires, and subjected to other forms of victimization too numerous to mention. Many such horrors are inflicted by the parents themselves upon their own children. The spiritual and psychological damage defies estimation. Our worldwide community cannot escape the consequences of these conditions. This realization should spur us all to urgent and sustained effort in the interests of children and the future.

Even though children's activities have been a part of past Plans, these have fallen short of the need. Spiritual education of children and junior youth are of paramount importance to the further progress of the community. It is therefore imperative that this deficiency be remedied. Institutes must be certain to include in their programs the training of teachers of children's classes, who can make their services available to local communities. But although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community as a whole, to

show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that of a rapidly declining order.

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behavior toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances.

Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth. The employment of the arts in various forms can be of great value in such activity.

And now we wish to address a few words to parents, who bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children. Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them. Still others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The beloved Master has said that

“it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son,” adding that, “should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.” Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mold their children’s moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá’í children’s classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá’í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

Our expectations are alive with the thought that the Continental Counsellors will gather in the Holy Land in January 2001 on an occasion that will celebrate the occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its permanent seat on the Hill of God. Auxiliary Board members from throughout the world will participate with them in what will undoubtedly turn out to be one of the historic happenings of the Formative Age. The coming together of such a constellation of Bahá’í officers must by its very nature produce untold benefits for a community which will again be close to ending one Plan and embarking on another. As we contemplate the implications, we turn our hearts in gratitude to the very dear Hands of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí Muhammad Varqá, who by their residence in the Holy Land hold aloft the torch of service which the beloved Guardian lit in their hearts.

With this Twelve Month Plan, we cross a bridge to which we shall never return. We launch this Plan in the earthly absence of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm. She remained with us to the virtual end of the twentieth century as a beam of the light that had shone during that incomparable period in the history of the human race. In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Master lamented His inability to travel throughout the world to raise the Divine call, and in the intensity of His disappointment He penned the hope: "Please God, ye may achieve it." Amatu'l-Bahá responded with boundless energy, touching far-flung spots of the earth in the 185 countries that were privileged to receive her inimitable gifts. Her example, which will retain forever its splendor, illumines the hearts of thousands upon thousands throughout the planet. Against the inadequacy of any other gesture, might we all not dedicate our humble efforts during this Plan to the memory of one for whom teaching was the primary purpose, the perfect joy of life?

The Universal House of Justice

April 2001

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2001

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

With great joy in our hearts and high expectations, we come to this Riḍván season at a change of time, when a new state of mind is evident among us all. Abroad in our world community there is a heightened awareness of the value of process, the necessity of planning and the virtue of systematic action in fostering growth and in developing the human resources by which expansion can be sustained and consolidation assured. The coherence of understanding about these prerequisites of progress cannot be overvalued, nor can the importance of perpetuating them through well-ordered training be overestimated. And so the arrival of our community at such a moment of consciousness is an occasion of significance for us. We are deeply grateful to the Blessed Beauty to be able to recognize and acclaim it at the very beginning of the global enterprise being launched during these festive days.

The power of will generated by this consciousness characterized the conference of the Continental Counsellors and the members of their Auxiliary Boards who gathered last January in the Holy Land. The event produced so illuminating an experience as to signalize the Faith's entry into a new epoch, the fifth of its Formative Age. Such a freshness of vitality as was displayed at this historic gathering came to be understood as a manifestation of the rising quality of activity throughout the community. Pursuit during the past year of the essentials for advancing the process of entry by troops confirmed this

observation. The path was thus paved for the Five Year Plan, the first venture being entered upon in the Fifth Epoch.

In augmenting major efforts of the previous Four Year Plan that brought into being more than 300 training institutes, the Twelve Month Plan achieved its purpose. It gathered significance through the notable responses of institutions and individuals to the call for a greater focus on the spiritual nurturing of children and the involvement of junior youth in Bahá'í community life. The training of teachers of children's classes and the inclusion of junior youth in the institute process have become a regular part of Bahá'í activity in a number of countries. Despite its brevity, the Twelve Month Plan had an importance beyond the objectives specifically assigned. The Plan was a dynamic link between a highly eventful epoch in Bahá'í history and the immensely promising prospects of a new one, for which its achievements have so well prepared the community. It has been etched in our annals, too, for the enduring effects of the Faith's activities at the end of the twentieth century—a century that deserves to be reflected upon by any Bahá'í who wishes to understand the tumultuous forces that influenced the life of the planet and the processes of the Cause itself at a crucial time in humanity's social and spiritual evolution. As an aid to so worthy an effort, *Century of Light*, a review of the twentieth century, was prepared at our request and under our supervision.

On many occasions during this one-year endeavor, the external affairs activities of the Faith were especially visible. Consider, for example, the instances of Bahá'í representatives' having participated prominently in the millennial events that took place in May, August and September at the urging of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The implications of so close and conspicuous an involvement of the Bahá'í International Community with the processes of the Lesser Peace will require the passage of time to be properly understood. Among other highlights was the continental colloquium organized in India by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, a new agency operating under the aegis of the Bahá'í International Community. Adopting the theme of “science, religion and development,” the conference featured the participation of leading nongovernmental organizations of India, as well as that of

institutions of such renown as UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. In October, the Bahá'í World News Service (BWNS) was launched on the Internet with the intention of reaching both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í audiences with news stories about developments throughout the Bahá'í world.

The intensive activities at the Bahá'í World Centre during the last year were, for the most part, made known to the friends through previous reports that included references to such achievements as the occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel; the Conference of Continental Counsellors and the members of their Auxiliary Boards held in the Holy Land last January; and the completion of the Mount Carmel projects, which are now receiving finishing touches in preparation for the celebratory events in May. Last October, for the first time, pilgrims and visitors were received at the new Reception Centre in Haifa, which became fully operational. At Bahjí the embellishment of the sacred site through the development of its gardens has proceeded continually; the effort has, however, received a boost from the new project initiated last year to construct a Visitors' Centre towards the northern end of the property beyond the Collins Gate. Scheduled for completion in the next few months, the structure is fully in place, and work is progressing in all areas, including finishing and landscaping. The new facilities will improve the ability of the World Centre to receive increasing numbers of pilgrims, short-term Bahá'í visitors, and special guests.

To conclude this summary of the year, we rejoice in informing you that, after the lapse of almost three decades, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia was restored at the National Convention held in Jakarta last Ridván. A ban imposed on Bahá'í activities in August 1962 severely restricted the actions of the Indonesian Bahá'ís for all that time, but they remained steadfast and wise in their long-suffering until changed circumstances in that country resulted in the lifting of the ban. May we not venture to hope, then, that a similar happy report concerning our beleaguered co-religionists in Iran, Egypt and other countries will not be too far distant?

Dear Friends: Two decades from now the Bahá'í world will celebrate the centenary of the inception of the Formative Age. We look back at the dawning of the Age from the vantage point of attainments that could hardly have been imagined at the outset. Up ahead are horizons that urgently summon the community to even greater achievements in the short span separating it from that centennial. Those heights can and must be scaled. The Five Year Plan, to which we call the urgent and sustained attention of the friends throughout the world, is intended to meet this challenge. It constitutes the first of a series of campaigns that will be pursued during these twenty years. This Plan marks the next phase in the aim to accomplish a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It demands an acceleration of this vital process and, furthermore, insists upon continuity in systematic endeavor on the part of its three constituent participants: the individual, the institutions, and the community.

No need to elaborate on the requirements of the Plan, for these were set out in our message to the assembled Counsellors in the Holy Land and subsequently shared with all National Spiritual Assemblies. Soon after their conference, the Counsellors began consulting with the National Assemblies about the execution of the Plan in their respective jurisdictions. The Plan's direction is therefore known to the friends everywhere, as regional and local preparations for pursuing its major aim are under way. There is a general awareness by now that efforts will be made to effect a deeper penetration of the Faith into more and more regions within countries. For example, where circumstances permit, local communities that exist in close proximity to each other will be mobilized to participate in intensive programs of growth. Other approaches will require methodical opening of new areas for which homefront pioneers must be raised up in the same consecrated spirit that prompted those who scattered abroad at earlier times to open virgin territories across continents and seas. Suffice it to say that the process animating this divinely driven enterprise will eventually expand as related features are gradually introduced and systematically integrated into its operation.

A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship, as circumstances in national communities permit. The

scheduling of these projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries. This development will unfold throughout successive stages of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. Upon the completion of the Mother Temple of the West, the Guardian started a program of constructing continental temples. The first among these were the Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs in Kampala, Sydney and Frankfurt, which were built in response to Ten Year Plan goals. The Universal House of Justice continued along these lines with the building of Temples in Panama City, Apia, and New Delhi. But this continental stage has yet to be completed: one more edifice remains to be built. It is with profound thankfulness and joy that we announce at this auspicious moment the decision to proceed with this last project. During the Five Year Plan, erection of the Mother Temple of South America in Santiago, Chile, will commence and thus fulfill a wish clearly expressed by Shoghi Effendi.

Meanwhile, the time is propitious that further steps be taken at the World Centre to develop the functions of the institutions occupying the new edifices on the Arc. The International Teaching Centre having advanced significantly in its work, attention will be given particularly to organizing the work of the Centre for the Study of the Texts. Enriching the translations into English from the Holy Texts will be a special object of this attention. The purpose of the institution is to assist the Universal House of Justice in consulting the Sacred Writings and to prepare translations and commentaries on the authoritative texts of the Faith. Moreover, in the Holy Land, a continued effort will be devoted towards the devising of measures to make possible a further increase in the number of pilgrims and visitors to the Bahá’í World Centre.

In our Ridván message five years ago, we announced the holding of a major event at the World Centre to mark the completion of the projects on Mount Carmel and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb to the public. The moment is upon us, and we exult in the anticipation of welcoming friends from virtually all countries to programs that will extend over a five-day period, 21-25 May. We are also happy to say that steps are being taken to connect the Bahá’í world to the proceedings through live transmissions on the World

Wide Web and by satellite, about which information is being provided. As the World Centre focuses on the preparations, excitement is building up among the public in Haifa, where municipal authorities have undertaken to publish a book entitled *Bahá'í Shrine and Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel: A Visual Journey* to coincide with the event. Moreover, the Israel Postal Authority is pursuing its decision to release at the same time a commemorative stamp featuring the Terraces. The significance of the occasion lies principally in the pause it will allow for a review of the remarkable distance the Cause has covered in its development during the twentieth century. It will be time, too, for considering the future implications of the phenomenal accomplishments symbolized by the rise of the monumental structures on God's holy mountain—a rise that opens the spiritual and administrative centres of our Faith to the gaze of the world.

As our community rejoices in these thrilling considerations, let every member bear in mind that there is no time for resting on laurels. Humanity's current plight is too desperate to allow for even a moment's hesitation in sharing the Bread of Life, which has come down from heaven in our time. Let there be no delay, then, in advancing the process that has every promise of success in ushering to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts the souls of all that hunger after truth.

May He Who keeps watch over the destiny of His divine System guide and direct and confirm every effort you make towards the realization of the urgent tasks set before you.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2002

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2002

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The onrush of happenings within and without the Faith at the beginning of the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age presents a spectacle that is awe-inspiring. Inside the Cause, the historic importance of the events last May that marked the completion of the edifices on Mount Carmel dazzled the senses as their impact was instantly communicated throughout the planet by satellite broadcasts and by the most extensive media coverage ever accorded a Bahá'í occasion. As the latest evidences in the tangible unfolding of the Tablet of Carmel were laid bare in breathtaking splendor before the eyes of the world, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh leapt to new prominence in its continuing rise from obscurity. An indelible impression was thus registered in the annals of the Dispensation.

This outward manifestation of the vitality animating our irrepressible Faith has had its counterpart in the thrust of the internal processes at work since the inception last Riḍván of the Five Year Plan. We are therefore moved to invite the delegates assembled at National Conventions and all other followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world to join us in reflecting on a few potent highlights of the operation of the Plan during its first year—highlights that cannot but rejoice hearts and inspire confidence in the incalculable potentialities of the course on which the Plan is set.

In their eager response to its requirements, National Spiritual Assemblies engaged in a series of planning sessions with Continental Counsellors before and immediately after Ridván. These set the pace for a vigorous launching distinguished by the steps taken to effectuate a new feature of the process of entry by troops. In each national community, Bahá'í institutions began the task of systematically mapping their country with the aim of sectioning it into clusters, each one being of a composition and size consonant with a scale of activities for growth and development that is manageable. Such a mapping, as has already been reported by some 150 countries, makes it possible to realize a pattern of well-ordered expansion and consolidation. Thus it creates as well a perspective, or vision, of systematic growth that can be sustained from cluster to cluster across an entire country. With this perspective, virgin clusters, like virgin territories identified in past campaigns, become goals for homefront pioneers, while opened clusters focus on their internal development mobilized by the mutually reinforcing work of the three constituent components of the Plan: the individual, the institutions and the community.

It is most encouraging to see that the progress of this work is being energized through the training institute process, which was considerably strengthened last year by the campaigns undertaken in many countries to increase the number of trained tutors. Where a training institute is well established and constantly functioning, three core activities—study circles, devotional meetings, and children's classes—have multiplied with relative ease. Indeed, the increasing participation of seekers in these activities, at the invitation of their Bahá'í friends, has lent a new dimension to their purposes, consequently effecting new enrollments. Here, surely, is a direction of great promise for the teaching work. These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops. By combining study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes within the framework of clusters, a model of coherence in lines of action has been put in place and is already producing welcome results. Worldwide application of this model, we feel confident, holds immense possibilities for the progress of the Cause in the years ahead.

These thrilling prospects were made the more viable by the enormous energy the International Teaching Centre invested in enriching the world community's understanding of systematic growth. Seizing the advantage afforded by the recent commencement of a new term of service for Auxiliary Board members, the Teaching Centre called for 16 regional orientation conferences to be held during the closing months of the year. To each of these it dispatched two of its members. In giving much focus to the theme "training institutes and systematic growth," the conferences, attended by all but a few of the Board members throughout the world, provided the participants with a wealth of information that will, through their tireless labors, suffuse the entire fabric of the community.

A community so richly endowed, so experienced, so focused on a divinely-inspired plan of action looks outward to a world whose inhabitants have, since the May 2001 events in the Holy Land, sunk more deeply into a slough of multiple disorders. And yet it is precisely under these seemingly inhospitable conditions that the Cause is meant to advance, and will thrive. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, the newly released volume containing English translations of the full texts of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to the kings and rulers of the world, has come as a propitious reminder of the dire consequences of ignoring His warnings against injustice, tyranny and corruption. The violent shocks being inflicted on the consciousness of people everywhere emphasize the urgency of the remedy He has prescribed. We, the scattered bands of His loyal servants, have thus come again to a time of irresistible opportunities—opportunities to teach His Cause, to build up His wondrous System, to provide sacrificially the urgently needed material means on which the progress and execution of spiritual activities inevitably depend.

Our inescapable task is to exploit the current turmoil, without fear or hesitation, for the purpose of spreading and demonstrating the transformational virtue of the one Message that can secure the peace of the world. Has the Blessed Beauty not empowered and reassured us with potent words? "Let not the happenings of the world sadden you" is His loving counsel. "I swear by God," He continues; "The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath

been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you.”

Unhampered by any doubts, unhindered by any obstacles, press on, then, with the Plan in hand.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2003

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2003

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

As the Five Year Plan enters upon its third year, momentum is building: the record of achievement during the year just ended far outdistanced that of the previous twelve months. The thrust of this momentum owes as much to the increased coherence achieved in the Plan's constituent elements as to the animating effect of the spirit of unrest pervading the planet.

The circumstances attending the opening of this new administrative year are at once critical, challenging and extraordinary in their significance. The entire course of the previous year was agitated by a succession of crises that culminated in the outbreak of war in the Middle East. The implications are no less significant for the progress of the community of the Most Great Name than for the evolution of an increasingly global society in the throes of a turbulent transition. Of necessity, the timing, scale and tendencies of this transition have not been predictable. How swift indeed has been the current change in the tide of world conditions! In the resultant conflict, involving so conspicuously the countries in which the earliest history of the Cause took shape, we see a fresh reminder of Bahá'u'lláh's warning that the "world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order." That the events of this crisis directly affect a territory with as rich a Bahá'í legacy as Iraq is particularly noteworthy.

The disruptions caused by this and other situations in the world have, in one instance, suggested the opening of a new chapter in the history of the highly prized but woefully oppressed Bahá'í community of a land in which the Manifestation of God for this Day resided for a whole decade. In another, they have dashed the preparations for the Ninth International Convention at the World Centre of our Faith. But, however disappointing, this calls for no dismay. When the Major Plan of God interferes with His Minor Plan, there should be no doubt that in due course a way will providentially be opened to an opportunity of stellar possibilities for advancing the interests of His glorious Cause.

The sorrows, fears and perplexities evoked by this latest conflict in the unfoldment of the Lesser Peace have intensified the feelings of grievance and outrage at the recurrent crises agitating the planet. The anxieties of people across the globe are even now being played out publicly in angry demonstrations too overwhelming to be ignored. The issues they protest and the emotions they arouse often add to the chaos and confusion they hope by such public displays to resolve. For the friends of God, there is an unambiguous explanation for what is occurring; they have only to recall the vision and principles offered by the Faith if they are to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the spread of distress and dismay. Let them strive to understand more deeply the Teachings that are relevant by reviewing letters of Shoghi Effendi which have been published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, particularly those entitled “The Goal of a New World Order,” “America and the Most Great Peace,” and “The Unfoldment of World Civilization.”

While the world continues on its tumultuous course, the Five Year Plan has reached the operational capacity to enable our community to make giant strides towards its major aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. The details of so encouraging a state of affairs for the Faith on all five continents have already been given in our 17 January letter; to it we invite your further study. Only a few key details need now be underscored: The division of countries into clusters has been completed in 179 of them; there exist some 17,000 of these seedbeds of expansion. Reflection meetings at the level of clusters have become a powerful means of unifying thought and action across

institutions and localities; they have lent a potent stimulus to institutional and individual initiatives in a mutually supportive spirit. The institute process has demonstrated even more prominently than before its influence as a generating force for expansion and consolidation. The core activities of the Plan have attained a scale far outstripping that of the past year. As a result, a growing number of friends are now active in the teaching and administrative work throughout the world, demonstrating the infectious spirit of confidence inspiring the enthusiasm of their efforts. Youth and children have been more systematically involved in the programs of the community, and non-Bahá'ís have been participating more numerous in study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes. It is indeed heartening to note that, in the brief period since the beginning of the Plan, where in many communities these three core activities had been sporadic they have become regular features and have multiplied. Here, then, is a snapshot of a world community focused and on the move as never before.

During the past year, as this pattern of growth became more firmly rooted in the operation of the Plan, other important developments were taking place. In the arena of external affairs, agencies of the Bahá'í International Community engaged in activities too numerous and varied to describe here, but of a collective effect too impressive to let pass without some mention. The highlight of such activities was the message we addressed last April to the world's religious leaders. This has given a fresh impulse to the approach being taken by the Bahá'í community to call the attention of the most influential elements of society to issues of critical importance to ensuring the peace of the world. Through the coordinating efforts of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information and the prompt efficiency of National Spiritual Assemblies, the message was distributed in a short time to the topmost ranks and other echelons of religious communities across the globe. The purpose of the initiative is to bring to the attention of all concerned the urgent need for religious leadership to address the problem of religious prejudice, which is becoming a steadily more serious danger to human well-being. The immediate reactions from many recipients indicate that the message is being seriously regarded and is even in some places lending new perspective to interfaith activities.

In the field of social and economic development a tempo has been attained that impresses ever more deeply the effects of institutional and individual effort on both the internal development of the community and the community's collaboration with others. The Office of Social and Economic Development reports that during the second year of the Plan eight new Bahá'í-inspired development agencies were established, operating in such diverse fields as the advancement of women, health, agriculture, child education and youth empowerment.

In the Holy Land, the English translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic epistle known as Javáhiru'l-Asrár was released under the title *Gems of Divine Mysteries*. The restoration of the Cell of Bahá'u'lláh in the prison at 'Akká was completed, and work began on the remainder of the upper floor of the prison cell area. As of the next pilgrimage season, beginning in October 2003, the number of pilgrims in each group will be raised from 150 to 200.

Furthermore, efforts at fostering the development of institutions operating at the World Centre were especially evident in the continuing evolution of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh under the distinguished leadership of the Trustee, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá. Through his wise initiative and constant endeavor, Dr. Varqá has inspired the education of the friends everywhere concerning the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. In the decade since the law was universally applied, a network of national and regional boards of trustees has been brought into existence, which provides coordination and direction to the service of an increasing number of deputies and representatives. Knowledge of this great law has spread widely, and friends from all continents are responding to it with a spirit of devotion, which the Trustee hopes will touch those who have not yet availed themselves of the promised blessings flowing from adherence to this law.

In the nearly two years since we announced the special necessity for financial support to maintain, at a befitting standard, the buildings and gardens at the World Centre, the World Centre Endowment Fund has been established. The contributions have not yet reached a level

equal to the annual need. However, we have felt obliged to set aside five million dollars of the contributions received as an earmarked fund towards building a corpus to provide a source of investment income dedicated to the original purpose. We have done so by drawing upon the Bahá'í International Fund to assist in covering the necessary expenditures, suspending activities in other fields that it would have been normal to pursue.

We are delighted to advise that, in response to the call issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of Chile, 185 design concepts have been received from architects and designers around the world for the Mother Temple of South America to be constructed in Santiago. A final choice will be announced in due course.

Dear Friends: Gratified by solid evidence of the progress being made far and wide, we trust in the continuing confirmations of our Supreme Lord upon the dedicated efforts you exert within the framework of the Five Year Plan—a Plan designed to fit the requirements of these times. May your persistence in its pursuit release those pent-up forces that, through the grace and favor of the Abhá Beauty, can advance by mighty thrusts the process of entry by troops in every land.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2004

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2004

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Three years of the Five Year Plan have passed. The processes set in motion in the Four Year Plan, strengthened through special attention to the Bahá'í education of children during the Twelve Month Plan, and followed up unflaggingly during these past years, are now fulfilling the high hopes with which they were launched. In every part of the world the three participants in the Plan—the individual, the community and the institutions—each playing a distinctive role, are reinforcing one another's actions. The core activities of study circles, children's classes and devotional meetings have become essential aspects and mutually enhancing achievements lending greater vigor and success to all the other elements of Bahá'í community life. Human resources are being augmented, and the Local Spiritual Assemblies are responding to the fresh demands of this rising vitality.

The capacity built for the Bahá'í education of children throughout the world is extraordinarily impressive. Initial efforts for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth are meeting with success. The movement of clusters from each level of activity to a higher one is well in hand and, as it proceeds, the kernel of avowed believers is being joined by a larger circle of people, still not Bahá'ís but enthusiastically involved in core activities of the Plan. Structures for

administering intensive growth are already appearing in certain advanced clusters. National Assemblies, while attending to the needs of all the clusters in their countries, have learned the value of concentrating special attention on certain priority clusters that show high promise, encouraging and developing them until the human resources they have raised up through the training institutes enable them to become centres of rapid, sustained growth.

As foreseen, the training institute is proving to be an engine of growth. On assessing the opportunities and needs of their respective communities, the great majority of National Spiritual Assemblies have chosen to adopt the course materials devised by the Ruhi Institute, finding them most responsive to the Plan's needs. This has had the collateral benefit that the same materials have been translated into many languages and, wherever Bahá'ís travel, they find other friends following the same path and familiar with the same books and methods.

A chaotic international society, torn by conflicting perceptions and interests, is assailed by rising terrorism, lawlessness and corruption, and eroded by economic failure, poverty and disease. In its midst the Bahá'í community is becoming increasingly visible, inspired by a divinely revealed vision, building on solid foundations, growing in strength through the processes that are now in place, and undaunted by seeming setbacks. An example of the capacity of the Bahá'í world to respond to unexpected conditions occurred a year ago, when multiple dangers required the cancellation of the International Bahá'í Convention; the election of the Universal House of Justice was duly held and the Plan went forward without a missed step. Concurrently, despite the disruption and chaos of life in Iraq, it was possible to contact the Bahá'ís in that land and reconstitute their Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now we announce with great joy the election, this Ridván, of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iraq, restored after more than thirty years of stifling oppression, to take its rightful place in the international Bahá'í community.

What the Divine Plan requires at this stage is for us to continue confidently and dynamically in the present direction, undeterred by

storms battering the world of humanity. Be sure that the Blessed Beauty will guide your steps and the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will reinforce your every effort for the progress of His Faith.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2005

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2005

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The breakthroughs that have occurred in the Bahá'í world since the beginning of the fifth epoch of the Formative Age have brought us immeasurable joy. The past twelve months have been no exception. The Bahá'í community has continued its systematic advance and now, as it enters the final year of the Five Year Plan, finds itself in a position of remarkable strength—a strength acquired through strenuous, deliberate exertion by the friends everywhere to promote the process of entry by troops.

While inadequate to express the full significance of the developments taking place, the statistics suggest something of the scope of what is being achieved. The human resources of the Faith have steadily multiplied. Altogether, more than 200,000 worldwide have completed Book 1 of the Ruhi Institute, and many thousands have reached the level where they can effectively act as tutors of the study circles that, with increasing frequency, are held in every part of the globe, over 10,000 at the last count. The number of seekers engaged in the core activities has continued to climb, crossing the 100,000 mark several months ago. Meanwhile, some 150 clusters have developed to the point that intensive programs of growth either have been launched or stand ready to be initiated. There is every indication that this number will be substantially surpassed by the end of the Plan.

In celebrating these achievements, one should acknowledge, equally, the advances in learning that have given rise to them. Intensive institute campaigns, which pay due attention to the practice required, have remained the vehicle for stimulating growth at the cluster level. As the necessary conditions have thus been created, systematic programs for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith have been launched accordingly. A valuable body of knowledge about the nature of intensive programs of growth is accumulating, and certain features of these endeavors are now well understood. Such programs tend to consist of a series of cycles, each of several months' duration, devoted to planning, expansion, and consolidation. Human resource development proceeds uninterrupted from one cycle to the next, ensuring that the process of expansion not only is sustained but progressively gathers momentum. While undoubtedly many more lessons are still to be garnered, the experience already gained makes it possible to replicate the approach in an ever-increasing number of clusters around the world.

That the victories won have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions is gratifying indeed. At the heart of these accomplishments lies the continual enhancement of the spiritual life of Bahá'í communities everywhere. This new spiritual vitality accounts for the growing participation of people of diverse backgrounds in devotional meetings, children's classes and study circles, which, in many cases, has resulted in their recognition of Bahá'u'lláh as God's Manifestation for this Day and in their declaration of faith.

New developments have, likewise, taken place at the World Centre. We have decided that the time is propitious to bring into being an International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to guide and supervise the work of Regional and National Boards of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh throughout the world. It will operate in close collaboration with the Chief Trustee, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, and will be able to benefit from his knowledge and counsel in carrying out its duties. The three members now appointed to the International Board of Trustees are Sally Foo, Ramin Khadem, and Grant Kvalheim. Their term of office will be determined at a later date. The members of the Board will not transfer

their residence to the Holy Land but will utilize the services of the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the World Centre in performing their functions.

At all levels and in every direction the Cause is achieving marked progress—from gains in expansion and consolidation at the grassroots to institutional developments of an international scope. Such encouraging signs of the growing solidarity of the community come at a time when evidences of the decline in society are, alas, all too apparent. No need to review here the features of the breakdown in which a demoralized world is entrapped. Yet it should not be forgotten that it is precisely these circumstances which increase receptivity to the Teachings and create new opportunities for their diffusion.

In our message of 26 November 1999, we referred to a series of global enterprises designed to carry the Bahá'í community through the final years of the first century of the Faith's Formative Age. Each Plan, we indicated, would focus on the central aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. The first in the series, the current Five Year Plan, will draw to a close in twelve short months, when we will call upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh to embark on another Plan of five years' duration. What we ask the friends to do in the intervening period is to bend all their energies to put into resolute action the systematic learning being so vigorously promoted by the International Teaching Centre. No Bahá'í should lose the priceless opportunity afforded by the remaining days of the Plan to reinforce in this way the foundation for the launching next Ridván of an even more ambitious undertaking. Our most fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines will surround you.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2006

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2006

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Riḍván 2006 is a moment charged with a spirit of triumph and anticipation. The followers of Bahá'u'lláh everywhere can take rightful pride in the magnitude of their accomplishments during the Five Year Plan now drawing to a close. And towards the future they can look with a confidence that is conferred only on those whose resolve is steeled through experience. The entire Bahá'í world is stirred at contemplating the scope of the five-year enterprise that lies ahead, the depth of consecration it will demand, and the results it is destined to achieve. Our prayers join yours as you turn in gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh for the privilege of witnessing the unfoldment of His purpose for humanity.

In our message of 27 December 2005 to the Counsellors gathered in the Holy Land, transmitted on that same day to all National Spiritual Assemblies, we delineated the features of the Five Year Plan that will stretch from 2006 to 2011. The friends and their institutions were urged to study the message thoroughly, and its content is no doubt well familiar to you. We now call upon each and every one of you to bend your energies towards ensuring that the goal of establishing over the next five years intensive programs of growth in no less than 1,500 clusters worldwide is successfully met. That in the months following the Counsellors' departure from the World Centre the groundwork for the Plan's launch was laid so rapidly and systematically in country after country is an indication of the eagerness with which the Bahá'í

community is taking up the challenge presented to it. While there is no need for us to elaborate further on the requirements of the Plan here, we feel compelled to offer for your reflection a few comments on the global context in which your individual and collective efforts will be pursued.

More than seventy years ago Shoghi Effendi penned his World Order letters in which he provided a penetrating analysis of the forces operating in the world. With an eloquence that was his alone, he described two great processes that have been set in motion by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, one destructive and the other integrative, both of which are propelling humanity towards the World Order He conceived. We were cautioned by the Guardian not to be "misled by the painful slowness characterizing the unfoldment of the civilization" being laboriously established or to be "deluded by the ephemeral manifestations of returning prosperity which at times appear to be capable of checking the disruptive influence of the chronic ills afflicting the institutions of a decaying age." No review of the course of events in recent decades can fail to acknowledge the gathering momentum of the processes he analyzed then with such precision.

One need only consider the deepening moral crisis engulfing humanity to appreciate the extent to which the forces of disintegration have rent the fabric of society. Have not the evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud, which the Guardian perceived with such clarity, become so widespread as to be readily apparent to even the casual observer? Does not the threat of terrorism of which he spoke loom so large on the international scene as to preoccupy the minds of young and old alike in every corner of the globe? Have not the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures so consolidated their power and influence as to assume authority over such human values as happiness, fidelity and love? Have not the weakening of family solidarity and the irresponsible attitude towards marriage reached such proportions as to endanger the existence of this fundamental unit of society? "The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions,"

about which Shoghi Effendi forewarned, are sadly revealing themselves “in their worst and most revolting aspects.”

The Guardian lays the greatest share of the blame for humanity’s moral downfall on the decline of religion as a social force. “Should the lamp of religion be obscured,” he draws our attention to the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.” The decades that followed the writing of his letters have seen not only a continued deterioration in the ability of religion to exercise moral influence, but also the betrayal of the masses through the unseemly conduct of religious institutions. Attempts at reinvigorating it have only given rise to a fanaticism that, if left unchecked, could destroy the foundation of civilized relationships among people. The persecution of the Bahá’ís in Iran, recently intensified, is ample evidence alone of the determination of the forces of darkness to quench the flame of faith wherever it burns brightly. Though confident in the ultimate triumph of the Cause, we dare not forget the warning of the Guardian that the Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than those who have afflicted it in the past.

There is no need to comment extensively on the impotence of statesmanship, another theme treated so masterfully by the Guardian in his World Order letters. The widening economic divide between the rich and the poor, the persistence of age-old animosities among nations, the swelling numbers of the displaced, the extraordinary rise in organized crime and violence, the pervasive sense of insecurity, the breakdown of basic services in so many regions, the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources—these are but a few of the signs of the inability of world leaders to devise viable schemes to alleviate humanity’s ills. This is not to say that sincere efforts have not been exerted, in fact, have not multiplied decade after decade. Yet these efforts, no matter how ingenious, fall well short of removing “the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society.” “Not even,” the Guardian asserted, “would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world . . . provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples

and nations.” “What else,” he confidently affirmed, “but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program” enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh, “embodying in its essentials God’s divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society.”

Penetrating, indeed, is Shoghi Effendi’s depiction of the process of disintegration accelerating in the world. Equally striking is the accuracy with which he analyzed the forces associated with the process of integration. He spoke of a “gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society” as an indirect manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh’s conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind. This spirit of solidarity has continued to spread over the decades, and today its effect is apparent in a range of developments, from the rejection of deeply ingrained racial prejudices to the dawning consciousness of world citizenship, from heightened environmental awareness to collaborative efforts in the promotion of public health, from the concern for human rights to the systematic pursuit of universal education, from the establishment of interfaith activities to the efflorescence of hundreds of thousands of local, national and international organizations engaged in some form of social action.

Yet for the followers of Bahá’u’lláh the most significant developments in the process of integration are those directly related to the Faith, many of which were nurtured by the Guardian himself and which have advanced tremendously since their modest beginnings. From the small nucleus of believers to whom he imparted his first teaching plans has grown a worldwide community with a presence in thousands of localities, each following a well-established pattern of activity that embodies the Faith’s principles and aspirations. Upon the foundation of the Administrative Order he so painstakingly laid during the early decades of his ministry has been raised a large, closely knit network of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies diligently administering the affairs of the Cause in more than one hundred and eighty countries. From the first contingents of

Auxiliary Board members for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith brought into being by him has arisen a legion of nearly one thousand stalwart workers serving in the field under the direction of eighty-one Counsellors ably guided by the International Teaching Centre. The evolution of the World Administrative Centre of the Faith, within the precincts of its World Spiritual Centre, a process to which the Guardian consecrated so much energy, has crossed a crucial threshold with the occupation by the Universal House of Justice of its Seat on Mount Carmel and the subsequent completion of the International Teaching Centre Building and the Centre for the Study of the Texts. The Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has steadily progressed under the stewardship of the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, appointed Trustee by Shoghi Effendi fifty years ago, culminating in the establishment in 2005 of an international board designed to promote the continued widespread application of this mighty law, a source of inestimable blessings for all humanity. The efforts of the Guardian to raise the profile of the Faith in international circles have developed into an extensive external affairs system, capable of both defending the interests of the Faith and proclaiming its universal message. The respect the Faith enjoys in international fora, whenever its representatives speak, is a most noteworthy accomplishment. The loyalty and devotion that the members of a community reflecting the diversity of the entire human race evince towards the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh constitute a storehouse of strength the like of which no other organized group can claim.

The Guardian foresaw that, in succeeding epochs of the Formative Age, the Universal House of Justice would launch a series of worldwide enterprises which would “symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities” of National Spiritual Assemblies. Over the course of three successive epochs now, the Bahá'í community has labored assiduously within the framework of the global Plans issued by the House of Justice and has succeeded in establishing a pattern of Bahá'í life that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards the spiritual revival of society. It has acquired the capacity to reach large numbers of receptive souls with the message, to confirm them, and to deepen their understanding of the essentials of the Faith they have embraced. It has learned to translate

the principle of consultation enunciated by its Founder into an effective tool for collective decision-making and to educate its members in its use. It has devised programs for the spiritual and moral education of its younger members and has extended them not only to its own children and junior youth but also to those of the wider community. With the pool of talent at its disposition, it has created a rich body of literature which includes volumes in scores of languages that address both its own needs and the interest of the general public. It has become increasingly involved in the affairs of society at large, undertaking a host of projects of social and economic development. Particularly since the opening of the fifth epoch in 2001, it has made significant strides in multiplying its human resources through a program of training that reaches the grassroots of the community and has discovered methods and instruments for establishing a sustainable pattern of growth.

It is in the context of the interplay of the forces described here that the imperative of advancing the process of entry by troops must be viewed. The Five Year Plan now opening requires that you concentrate your energies on this process and ensure that the two complementary movements at its heart are accelerated. This should be your dominant concern. As your efforts bear fruit and the dynamics of growth reach a new level of complexity, there will be challenges and opportunities for the World Centre itself to address in the coming five years in fields such as external affairs, social and economic development, administration, and the application of Bahá'í law. The growth of the community has already necessitated that new arrangements be put in place to double the number of pilgrims to four hundred in each group beginning in October 2007. There are several other projects that will also have to be pursued. Among these are the further development of the gardens surrounding the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the Ridván Garden and Mazra'ih; the restoration of the International Archives Building; structural repairs to the Shrine of the Báb, the full extent of which are not yet clear; and the construction of the House of Worship in Chile as envisioned by the Guardian, the last of the continental Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. As these endeavors advance, we will call on you from time to time for assistance, both in the form of financial support and specialized talents, mindful that the resources of the Faith should, to the greatest measure possible, be channeled to the requirements of the Plan.

Dear friends: That the forces of disintegration are gaining in range and power cannot be ignored. It is equally clear that the community of the Greatest Name has been guided from strength to strength by the Hand of Providence and must now increase in size and augment its resources. The course set by the Five Year Plan is straightforward. How can those of us aware of the plight of humanity, and conscious of the direction in which history is unfolding, not arise to the fullest of our capacity and dedicate ourselves to its aim? Do not the words of the Guardian that “the stage is set” hold as true for us today as they did when he wrote them during the first Seven Year Plan? Let his words ring in your ears: “There is no time to lose.” “There is no room left for vacillation.” “Such an opportunity is irreplaceable.” “To try, to persevere, is to insure ultimate and complete victory.” Be assured of our continued prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance and protection.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2007

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2007

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The first year of the Five Year Plan bears eloquent testimony to the spirit of devotion with which Bahá'u'lláh's followers have embraced the framework for action presented in our message of 27 December 2005 and their commitment to advancing the process of entry by troops. Where this framework has been applied coherently in all its dimensions in a cluster, steady progress is being achieved, both in terms of the participation of the believers and their friends in community life and in terms of numerical growth, with some clusters reporting enrolments in the hundreds every few months and others in scores. Vital to this development has been a heightened awareness of the spiritual nature of the enterprise, together with an increased understanding of those decision-making instruments that are defined by the principal features of the Plan.

Prior to our launching the current series of global Plans focused on the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops, the Bahá'í community had passed through a stage of rapid, large-scale expansion in many parts of the world—an expansion which ultimately was impossible to sustain. The challenge, then, lay not so much in swelling the ranks of the Cause with new adherents, at least from populations of proven receptivity, but in incorporating them into the

life of the community and raising up from among them adequate numbers dedicated to its further expansion. So crucial was it for the Bahá'í world to address this challenge that we made it a central feature of the Four Year Plan and called upon National Spiritual Assemblies to spend the greater part of their energies creating institutional capacity, in the form of the training institute, to develop human resources. Ever-increasing contingents of believers, we indicated, would need to benefit from a formal programme of training designed to endow them with the knowledge and spiritual insights, with the skills and abilities, required to carry out the acts of service that would sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Today as we observe the workings of those clusters which are in a robust state of growth, we note that in every one of them the friends have continued to strengthen the institute process, while learning to mobilize their expanding nucleus of active supporters of the Faith, to establish an efficient scheme for the coordination of their efforts, to weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavours into an effective pattern of unified action, and to draw on the analysis of pertinent information in planning the cycles of their activities. That they have found the means for carrying forward the work of expansion and consolidation hand in hand—the key to sustained growth—is demonstrable. Such evidence will surely inspire every devoted believer to remain resolute on the path of systematic learning that has been set.

The accomplishments of these years of prodigious effort have not been confined to those clusters where the work of large-scale expansion and consolidation is being thus revitalized. The approach taken during the Four Year Plan, followed by the Twelve Month Plan and the previous Five Year Plan, proved instrumental in creating conditions for the believers to extend their endeavours to a wide circle of people, engaging them in various aspects of community life. The benefits of the decade-long process of capacity building in the three participants of the global Plans are now broadly apparent. Everywhere there was a need to gain an understanding of the dynamics of human resource development. Everywhere the friends had to learn the requirements of steady growth—to promote systematic action and to avoid distractions, to bring certain elements of

collective decision-making close to the grassroots and to create communities with a sense of mission, to encourage universal participation and to accommodate different segments of society in their activities, particularly children and junior youth, the future champions of the Cause of God and builders of His civilization.

With so firm a foundation in place, the foremost thought in the mind of each and every believer should be teaching. Whether in their personal efforts they teach their friends in firesides and then involve them in the core activities or use these activities as their primary instrument for teaching, whether as a community they make their work with children and junior youth the initial thrust in a cluster or focus first on the older generations, whether in their collective endeavours they visit families in teams as part of an intensive campaign or call on seekers in their homes periodically over time—these are decisions that can only be made according to the circumstances and possibilities of the friends and the nature of the populations with whom they interact. What all must acknowledge, irrespective of circumstance, are both the crying need of a humanity that, bereft of spiritual sustenance, is sinking deeper into despair and the urgency of the responsibility to teach with which we each have been entrusted as members of the community of the Greatest Name.

Bahá'u'lláh has commanded His followers to teach the Cause. Already thousands upon thousands are energetically applying the provisions of the Plan to open up avenues for them to guide souls to the Ocean of His Revelation. We look with expectant eyes to the day when teaching is the dominating passion in the life of every believer and when the unity of the community is so strong as to enable this state of enkindlement to express itself in unremitting action in the field of service. This, then, is our ardent hope for you and the object of our most fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2008

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2008

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Thousands upon thousands, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in systematic study of the Creative Word in an environment that is at once serious and uplifting. As they strive to apply through a process of action, reflection and consultation the insights thus gained, they see their capacity to serve the Cause rise to new levels. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. As they call on one another in their homes and pay visits to families, friends and acquaintances, they enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import, deepen their knowledge of the Faith, share Bahá'u'lláh's message, and welcome increasing numbers to join them in a mighty spiritual enterprise. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they extend their efforts widely to involve ever-growing contingents of participants in classes that become centres of attraction for the young and strengthen the roots of the Faith in society. They assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. And with the advantage of a greater abundance of human resources, an increasing number of them

are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity in both their spiritual and material dimensions. Such is the panorama before us as we pause this Ridván to observe the progress of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

On several occasions we have indicated that the aim of the series of global Plans that will carry the Bahá'í world to the celebration of the centenary of the Faith's Formative Age in 2021 will be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the community. At this, the midway point of what will be a quarter of a century of consistent, focused exertion, the evidences of increased capacity are everywhere apparent. Of particular significance is the widening impact of the dynamism flowing from the interactions between the three participants in the Plan. Institutions, from the national to the local level, see with ever greater clarity how to create conditions conducive to the expression of the spiritual energies of a growing number of believers in pursuit of a common goal. The community is serving more and more as that environment in which individual effort and collective action, mediated by the institute, can complement each other in order to achieve progress. The vibrancy it manifests and the unity of purpose that animates its endeavours are drawing into its swelling ranks those from every walk of life eager to dedicate their time and energies to the welfare of humanity. That the doors of the community are more widely open for any receptive soul to enter and receive sustenance from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is clear. No greater testament is there to the efficacy of the interactions among the Plan's three participants than the dramatic acceleration in the tempo of teaching that was witnessed this past year. The advance made in the process of entry by troops was significant indeed.

Within the sphere of these enhanced interactions, individual initiative is becoming increasingly effective. In previous messages we have referred to the impetus that the institute process imparts to the exercise of initiative by the individual believer. The friends in every continent are engaged in study of the Writings for the explicit purpose of learning to apply the teachings to the growth of the Faith. Remarkable numbers are now shouldering responsibility for the spiritual vitality of their communities; energetically, they are carrying

out those acts of service befitting a healthy pattern of growth. As they have persevered in the field of service to the Cause, maintaining a humble posture of learning, their courage and wisdom, zeal and acuity, fervour and circumspection, determination and trust in God have combined all the more to reinforce one another. In their presentation of the message of Bahá'u'lláh and the exposition of its verities, they have taken to heart the words of Shoghi Effendi that they must neither “hesitate” nor “falter”, neither “overstress” nor “whittle down” the truth which they champion. Neither are they “fanatical” nor “excessively liberal”. Through their constancy in teaching, they have increased their ability to determine whether the receptivity of their listener requires them to be “wary” or “bold”, to “act swiftly” or to “mark time”, to be “direct” or “indirect” in the methods they employ.

What we continue to find encouraging is how well disciplined is this individual initiative. Communities everywhere are gradually internalizing the lessons being learned from systematization, and the framework defined by the current series of Plans lends consistency and flexibility to the endeavours of the friends. Far from restricting them, this framework enables them to seize opportunities, to build relationships, and to translate into reality a vision of systematic growth. In a word, it gives shape to their collective powers.

As we survey what has been accomplished around the world, our hearts are filled with particular admiration for the believers in Iran, who, under the most arduous conditions, have arisen boldly to serve their country and are bending their energies toward its revitalization, though the avenues open to them are limited. And given the restrictions placed on the administration of the Faith, they have set out on an individual basis to acquaint their fellow citizens with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, directly engaging them in conversations about His redeeming message. Not only have they received unprecedented support from enlightened souls as they have begun to do so, but they have encountered a receptivity far beyond anything they would have imagined possible.

Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh conscious of the forces of integration and disintegration operating in society today sees the relationship between the rise in receptivity to the Faith in all parts of the globe and the failings of the world's systems. That such receptivity will increase as the agonies of humanity deepen is certain. Let there be no mistake: The capacity building that has been set in motion to respond to mounting receptivity is still in its earliest stages. The magnitude of the demands of a world in disarray will test this capacity to its limits in the years ahead. Humanity is battered by forces of oppression, whether generated from the depths of religious prejudice or the pinnacles of rampant materialism. Bahá'ís are able to discern the causes of this affliction. "What 'oppression' is more grievous", Bahá'u'lláh asks, "than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?" There is no time to lose. Continued progress must be achieved in the activity and development of the three participants in the Plan.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has extolled "two calls" to "success and prosperity" that can be heard from the "heights of the happiness of mankind". One is the call of "civilization", of "progress of the material world". It comprises the "laws", "regulations", "arts and sciences" through which humanity develops. The other is the "soul-stirring call of God", on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. "This second call", the Master has explained, "is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God." As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.

Sustaining growth in cluster after cluster will depend on the qualities that distinguish your service to the peoples of the world. So free must

be your thoughts and actions of any trace of prejudice—racial, religious, economic, national, tribal, class, or cultural—that even the stranger sees in you loving friends. So high must be your standard of excellence and so pure and chaste your lives that the moral influence you exert penetrates the consciousness of the wider community. Only if you demonstrate the rectitude of conduct to which the writings of the Faith call every soul will you be able to struggle against the myriad forms of corruption, overt and subtle, eating at the vitals of society. Only if you perceive honour and nobility in every human being—this independent of wealth or poverty—will you be able to champion the cause of justice. And to the extent that administrative processes of your institutions are governed by the principles of Bahá'í consultation will the great masses of humanity be able to take refuge in the Bahá'í community.

As you press ahead, be confident that the Concourse on high is marshalling its forces and stands ready to come to your aid. Our continued prayers will surround you.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2009

The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2009

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

A mere three years ago we set before the Bahá'í world the challenge of exploiting the framework for action that had emerged with such clarity at the conclusion of the last global Plan. The response, as we had hoped, was immediate. With great vigour the friends everywhere began to pursue the goal of establishing intensive programmes of growth in no less than 1,500 clusters worldwide, and the number of such programmes soon started to climb. But no one could have imagined then how profoundly the Lord of Hosts, in His inscrutable wisdom, intended to transform His community in so short a span of time. What a purposeful and confident community it was that celebrated its accomplishments at the midway point of the current Plan in forty-one regional conferences across the globe! What an extraordinary contrast did its coherence and energy provide to the bewilderment and confusion of a world caught in a spiral of crisis! This, indeed, was the community of the blissful to which the Guardian had referred. This was a community aware of the vast potentialities with which it has been endowed and conscious of the role it is destined to play in rebuilding a broken world. This was a community in the ascendant, subject to severe repression in one part of the globe, yet rising up undeterred and undismayed as a united whole and strengthening its capacity to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose to liberate humankind from the yoke of the most grievous oppression.

And in the nearly eighty-thousand participants who attended the conferences we saw the emergence on the historical scene of an individual believer supremely confident in the efficacy of the Plan's methods and instruments and remarkably deft at wielding them. Each and every soul of this mighty sea stood as testimony to the transforming potency of the Faith. Each and every one was evidence of Bahá'u'lláh's promise to assist all those who arise with detachment and sincerity to serve Him. Each and every one offered a glimpse of that race of beings, consecrated and courageous, pure and sanctified, destined to evolve over generations under the direct influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In them we saw the first signs of the fulfilment of our hope expressed at the outset of the Plan that the edifying influence of the Faith would be extended to hundreds of thousands through the institute process. There is every indication that, by the end of the Ridván period, the number of intensive programmes of growth around the world will have crossed the 1,000 mark. What more can we do at the opening of this most joyous Festival than to bow our heads in humility before God and offer Him thanksgiving for His unbounded generosity to the community of the Greatest Name.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2010

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2010

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

With hearts filled with admiration for the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, we are pleased to announce that, as this most joyous Riḍván season opens, there is in every continent of the globe a fresh complement of intensive programmes of growth under way, raising the total number worldwide over the 1,500 mark and securing the goal of the Five Year Plan, one year in advance of its conclusion. We bow our heads in gratitude to God for this astounding achievement, this signal victory. All who have laboured in the field will appreciate the bounty He has bestowed on His community in granting it a full year to strengthen the pattern of expansion and consolidation now everywhere established, in preparation for the tasks it will be called upon to undertake in its next global enterprise—a plan of five years' duration, the fifth in a series with the explicit aim of advancing the process of entry by troops.

We feel moved, as we take pause on this festive occasion, to make clear that what evokes such a deep sense of pride and gratitude in our hearts is not so much the numerical feat you have achieved, remarkable as it is, but a combination of developments at the more profound level of culture, to which this accomplishment attests. Chief among them is the rise we have observed in the capacity of the

friends to converse with others on spiritual matters and to speak with ease about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation. They have understood well that teaching is a basic requirement of a life of generous giving.

In recent messages we have expressed joy at witnessing the steady increase in the tempo of teaching across the globe. The discharge of this fundamental spiritual obligation by the individual believer has always been, and continues to be, an indispensable feature of Bahá'í life. What the establishment of 1,500 intensive programmes of growth has made evident is how courageous and deliberate the rank and file of the believers have become in stepping outside their immediate circle of family members and friends, ready to be led by the guiding Hand of the All-Merciful to receptive souls in whatever quarter they may reside. Even the most modest estimates suggest that there are now tens of thousands who participate in periodic campaigns to establish ties of friendship, on the basis of shared understanding, with those previously regarded as strangers.

In their efforts to present the essentials of the Faith plainly and unequivocally, the believers have benefited greatly from the illustrative example in Book 6 of the Ruhi Institute. Where the logic underlying that presentation is appreciated, and the urge to convert it into a formula overcome, it gives rise to a conversation between two souls—a conversation distinguished by the depth of understanding achieved and the nature of the relationship established. To the extent that the conversation continues beyond the initial encounter and veritable friendships are formed, a direct teaching effort of this kind can become a catalyst for an enduring process of spiritual transformation. Whether the first contact with such newly found friends elicits an invitation for them to enrol in the Bahá'í community or to participate in one of its activities is not an overwhelming concern. More important is that every soul feel welcome to join the community in contributing to the betterment of society, commencing a path of service to humanity on which, at the outset or further along, formal enrolment can occur.

The significance of this development should not be underestimated. In every cluster, once a consistent pattern of action is in place, attention needs to be given to extending it more broadly through a network of co-workers and acquaintances, while energies are, at the same time, focused on smaller pockets of the population, each of which should become a centre of intense activity. In an urban cluster, such a centre of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighbourhood; in a cluster that is primarily rural in character, a small village would offer a suitable social space for this purpose. Those who serve in these settings, both local inhabitants and visiting teachers, would rightly view their work in terms of community building. To assign to their teaching efforts such labels as “door-to-door”, even though the first contact may involve calling upon the residents of a home without prior notice, would not do justice to a process that seeks to raise capacity within a population to take charge of its own spiritual, social and intellectual development. The activities that drive this process, and in which newly found friends are invited to engage—meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community; classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children; groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth; circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives—may well need to be maintained with assistance from outside the local population for a time. It is to be expected, however, that the multiplication of these core activities would soon be sustained by human resources indigenous to the neighbourhood or village itself—by men and women eager to improve material and spiritual conditions in their surroundings. A rhythm of community life should gradually emerge, then, commensurate with the capacity of an expanding nucleus of individuals committed to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a new World Order.

Within this context, receptivity manifests itself in a willingness to participate in the process of community building set in motion by the core activities. In cluster after cluster where an intensive programme of growth is now in operation, the task before the friends this coming year is to teach within one or more receptive populations, employing a direct method in their exposition of the fundamentals of their Faith, and find those souls longing to shed the lethargy imposed on them by society and work alongside one another in their neighbourhoods and

villages to begin a process of collective transformation. If the friends persist in their efforts to learn the ways and methods of community building in small settings in this way, the long-cherished goal of universal participation in the affairs of the Faith will, we are certain, move by several orders of magnitude within grasp.

To meet this challenge, the believers and the institutions that serve them will have to strengthen the institute process in the cluster, increasing significantly within its borders the number of those capable of acting as tutors of study circles; for it should be recognized that the opportunity now open to the friends to foster a vibrant community life in neighbourhoods and villages, characterized by such a keen sense of purpose, was only made possible by crucial developments that occurred over the past decade in that aspect of Bahá'í culture which pertains to deepening.

When in December 1995 we called for the establishment of training institutes worldwide, the pattern most prevalent in the Bahá'í community for helping individual believers to deepen their knowledge of the Faith consisted principally of occasional courses and classes, of varying durations, addressing a variety of subjects. That pattern had satisfied well the needs of an emerging worldwide Bahá'í community, still relatively few in number and concerned chiefly with its geographic spread across the globe. We made clear at the time, however, that another approach to the study of the writings would have to take shape, one that would spur large numbers into the field of action, if the process of entry by troops was to accelerate appreciably. In this connection, we asked that training institutes assist ever-growing contingents of believers in serving the Cause through the provision of courses that would impart the knowledge, insights and skills required to carry out the many tasks associated with accelerated expansion and consolidation.

To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of

the pearls of wisdom that lie therein. In this light, local deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá'í life. Just as the habit of daily reading will remain an integral part of Bahá'í identity, so will these forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community. But understanding the implications of the Revelation, both in terms of individual growth and social progress, increases manifold when study and service are joined and carried out concurrently. There, in the field of service, knowledge is tested, questions arise out of practice, and new levels of understanding are achieved. In the system of distance education that has now been established in country after country—the principal elements of which include the study circle, the tutor and the curriculum of the Ruhi Institute—the worldwide Bahá'í community has acquired the capacity to enable thousands, nay millions, to study the writings in small groups with the explicit purpose of translating the Bahá'í teachings into reality, carrying the work of the Faith forward into its next stage: sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Let no one fail to appreciate the possibilities thus created. Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information. That the Bahá'í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed—is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement.

What is imperative is that the quality of the educational process fostered at the level of the study circle rise markedly over the next

year so that the potential of local populations to create such dynamics is realized. Much will fall on those who serve as tutors in this respect. Theirs will be the challenge to provide the environment that is envisioned in the institute courses, an environment conducive to the spiritual empowerment of individuals, who will come to see themselves as active agents of their own learning, as protagonists of a constant effort to apply knowledge to effect individual and collective transformation. Failing this, no matter how many study circles are formed in a cluster, the force necessary to propel change will not be generated.

If the work of the tutor is to reach higher and higher degrees of excellence, it must be remembered that primary responsibility for the development of human resources in a region or country rests with the training institute. While striving to increase the number of its participants, the institute as a structure—from the board, to the coordinators at different levels, to the tutors at the grassroots—must lay equal stress on the effectiveness of the system in its entirety, for, in the final analysis, sustained quantitative gains will be contingent on qualitative progress. At the level of the cluster, the coordinator must bring both practical experience and dynamism to his or her efforts to accompany those who serve as tutors. He or she should arrange periodic gatherings for them to reflect on their endeavours. Events organized to repeat the study of segments selected from the institute material may occasionally prove helpful, provided they do not inculcate a need for perpetual training. The capabilities of a tutor develop progressively as an individual enters the field of action and assists others in contributing to the aim of the present series of global Plans, through study of the sequence of courses and implementation of their practical component. And as men and women of various ages move along the sequence and complete their study of each course with the help of tutors, others must stand ready to accompany them in acts of service undertaken according to their strengths and interests—particularly the coordinators responsible for children's classes, for junior youth groups and for study circles, acts of service crucial to the perpetuation of the system itself. To ensure that the proper measure of vitality is pulsating through this system should continue to be the object of intense learning in every country over the course of the next twelve months.

Concern for the spiritual education of children has long been an element of the culture of the Bahá'í community, a concern that resulted in two, coexisting realities. One, emulating the achievements of the Bahá'ís of Iran, was characterized by the capacity to offer systematic classes, from grade to grade, to children from Bahá'í families, generally with the aim of imparting basic knowledge of the history and teachings of the Faith to rising generations. In most parts of the world, the number who benefited from such classes has been relatively small. The other reality emerged in areas where large-scale enrolments took place, both rural and urban. A more inclusive attitude dominated that experience. Yet while children from households of all kinds were at once eager and welcome to attend Bahá'í classes, various factors prevented lessons from being conducted with the required degree of regularity, year after year. How pleased we are to see this duality, a consequence of historical circumstances, begin to fall away as friends trained by institutes everywhere strive to offer classes, open to all, on a systematic basis.

Such promising beginnings have now to be vigorously pursued. In every cluster with an intensive programme of growth in operation, efforts need to be made to systematize further the provision of spiritual education to increasing numbers of children, from families of many backgrounds—a requisite of the community-building process gathering momentum in neighbourhoods and villages. This will be a demanding task, one that calls for patience and cooperation on the part of parents and institutions alike. The Ruhi Institute has already been requested to expedite plans to complete its courses for training children's class teachers at different levels including the corresponding lessons, starting with youngsters aged 5 or 6 and proceeding to those aged 10 or 11, in order to close the present gap between existing lessons and its textbooks for junior youth, such as "Spirit of Faith" and the forthcoming "Power of the Holy Spirit," which provide a distinctly Bahá'í component to the programme for that age group. As these additional courses and lessons become available, institutes in every country will be able to prepare the teachers and the coordinators required to put in place, grade by grade, the core of a programme for the spiritual education of children, around which secondary elements can be organized. Meanwhile, institutes should do their best to provide teachers with suitable

materials, from among others currently in existence, for use in their classes with children of various ages, as necessary.

The International Teaching Centre has earned our abiding gratitude for the vital impetus it lent to the efforts to secure the early attainment of the goal of the Five Year Plan. To see the degree of energy it brought to this worldwide enterprise, following so tenaciously the progress in every continent and collaborating so closely with the Continental Counsellors, was to catch a glimpse of the tremendous power inherent in the Administrative Order. As the Teaching Centre now turns its attention with equal vigour to questions related to the efficacy of activities at the cluster level, it will no doubt give special consideration to the implementation of Bahá'í children's classes. We are confident that its analysis of the experience gained in a few selected clusters this coming year, representative of diverse social realities, will shed light on practical issues which will make possible the establishment of regular classes, for children of every age, in neighbourhoods and villages.

The rapid spread of the programme for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth is yet another expression of cultural advance in the Bahá'í community. While global trends project an image of this age group as problematic, lost in the throes of tumultuous physical and emotional change, unresponsive and self-consumed, the Bahá'í community—in the language it employs and the approaches it adopts—is moving decidedly in the opposite direction, seeing in junior youth instead altruism, an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. Account after account, in which junior youth in countries all over the planet give voice to their thoughts as participants in the programme, testifies to the validity of this vision. There is every indication that the programme engages their expanding consciousness in an exploration of reality that helps them to analyse the constructive and destructive forces operating in society and to recognize the influence these forces exert on their thoughts and actions, sharpening their spiritual perception, enhancing their powers of expression and reinforcing moral structures that will serve them throughout their lives. At an age when burgeoning intellectual, spiritual and physical powers become accessible to them, they are being given the tools

needed to combat the forces that would rob them of their true identity as noble beings and to work for the common good.

That the major component of the programme explores themes from a Bahá'í perspective, but not in the mode of religious instruction, has opened the way for its extension to junior youth in a variety of settings and circumstances. In many such instances, then, those who implement the programme enter confidently into the area of social action, encountering a range of questions and possibilities, which are being followed and organized in a global process of learning by the Office of Social and Economic Development in the Holy Land. Already the accumulating body of knowledge and experience has given rise to the capacity in several clusters scattered across the globe to each sustain over one thousand junior youth in the programme. To help others advance swiftly in this direction, the Office is establishing a network of sites in all continents, with the assistance of a corps of believers, that can be used to provide training to coordinators from scores upon scores of clusters. These resource persons continue to support coordinators upon their return to their respective clusters, enabling them to create a spiritually charged environment in which the junior youth programme can take root.

Further knowledge is sure to accrue in this area of endeavour, although a pattern of action is already clear. Only the capacity of the Bahá'í community limits the extent of its response to the demand for the programme by schools and civic groups. Within the clusters that today are the focus of an intensive programme of growth, there is a wide array of circumstances, from those with a few sporadic junior youth groups to those maintaining a number sufficient to require the services of a dedicated coordinator, who could receive ongoing support from a site for the dissemination of learning. To ensure that this capacity increases across the entire spectrum of these clusters, we are calling for 32 learning sites, each serving some twenty clusters with full-time coordinators, to be in operation by the end of the current Plan. In all other such clusters, priority should be given to creating the capacity over the coming year to offer the programme, multiplying the number of groups systematically.

The developments we have mentioned thus far—the rise in capacity to teach the Faith directly and to enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import with people from every walk of life, the efflorescence of an approach to study of the writings that is wedded to action, the renewal of commitment to provide spiritual education to the young in neighbourhoods and villages on a regular basis, and the spread in influence of a programme that instils in junior youth the sense of a twofold moral purpose, to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society—are all reinforced, in no small measure, by yet another advance at the level of culture, the implications of which are far-reaching indeed. This evolution in collective consciousness is discernable in the growing frequency with which the word “accompany” appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common vocabulary of the Bahá’í community. It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith. Such an approach offers a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation.

In relationships among the friends, then, this development in culture finds expression in the quality of their interactions. Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea. And in such a state souls labour together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centred at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge. This is what we see in the present pattern of activity

unfolding across the globe, propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.

Not only does this advance in culture influence relations among individuals, but its effects can also be felt in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith. As learning has come to distinguish the community's mode of operation, certain aspects of decision making related to expansion and consolidation have been assigned to the body of the believers, enabling planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground. Specifically, a space has been created, in the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward. A similar space is opened by the institute, which makes provision for those serving as tutors, children's class teachers, and animators of junior youth groups in a cluster to meet severally and consult on their experience. Intimately connected to this grassroots consultative process are the agencies of the training institute and the Area Teaching Committee, together with the Auxiliary Board members, whose joint interactions provide another space in which decisions pertaining to growth are taken, in this case with a higher degree of formality. The workings of this cluster-level system, born of exigencies, point to an important characteristic of Bahá'í administration: even as a living organism, it has coded within it the capacity to accommodate higher and higher degrees of complexity, in terms of structures and processes, relationships and activities, as it evolves under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

That the institutions of the Faith at all levels—from the local and the regional, to the national and the continental—are able to manage such growing complexity with greater and greater dexterity is both a sign and a necessity of their steady maturation. Evolving relationships among administrative structures have brought the Local Spiritual Assembly to the threshold of a new stage in the exercise of its responsibilities to diffuse the Word of God, to mobilize the energies of the believers, and to forge an environment that is spiritually edifying. On previous occasions we have explained that the maturity

of a Spiritual Assembly cannot be assessed by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning alone. Rather its strength must be measured, to a large extent, by the vitality of the spiritual and social life of the community it serves—a growing community that welcomes the constructive contributions of both those who are formally enrolled and those who are not. It is gratifying to see that current approaches, methods and instruments are providing the means for Local Spiritual Assemblies, even those newly formed, to fulfil these responsibilities as they set about to ensure that the requirements of the Five Year Plan are adequately met in their localities. Indeed, the Assembly's proper involvement with the Plan becomes crucial to every attempt to embrace large numbers—itsself a requisite for the manifestation of the full range of its powers and capacities.

The development that we are sure to witness in Local Spiritual Assemblies over the next several years is made possible by the growing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies, whose ability to think and act strategically has risen perceptibly, especially as they have learned to analyse the community-building process at the grassroots with increasing acuity and effectiveness and to inject into it, as needed, assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance. In countries where conditions demand it, they have devolved a number of their responsibilities in this respect to Regional Councils, decentralizing certain administrative functions, enhancing institutional capacity in areas under their jurisdiction, and fostering more sophisticated sets of interactions. It is no exaggeration to say that the full engagement of National Assemblies was instrumental in creating the final thrust required to attain the goal of the current Plan, and we expect to see further developments in this direction as, in concert with the Counsellors, they exert in the course of the critical, fleeting months ahead a supreme effort to ready their communities to embark on the next five-year enterprise.

Without question, the evolution of the institution of the Counsellors constitutes one of the most significant advances in the Bahá'í Administrative Order during the past decade. That institution had already made extraordinary leaps in its development when, in January 2001, the Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members gathered in

the Holy Land for the conference marking the occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel. There is no doubt that the energies released by that event have propelled the institution rapidly forward. The degree of influence the Counsellors and their auxiliaries have exerted on the progress of the Plan demonstrates that they have assumed their natural place in the forefront of the teaching field. We are confident that the coming year will bind the institutions of the Administrative Order further together in collaboration, as all strive to reinforce, each in accordance with its evolving functions and responsibilities, the mode of learning that has become a prominent feature of the community's functioning—this, most urgently in those clusters experiencing intensive programmes of growth.

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Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation", He Himself proclaims, "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.

In this long-term process of capacity building, the Bahá'í community has devoted nearly a decade and a half to systematizing its experience in the teaching field, learning to open certain activities to more and more people and to sustain its expansion and consolidation. All are welcome to enter the community's warm embrace and receive

sustenance from Bahá'u'lláh's life-giving message. No greater joy is there, to be sure, than for a soul, yearning for the Truth, to find shelter in the stronghold of the Cause and draw strength from the unifying power of the Covenant. Yet every human being and every group of individuals, irrespective of whether they are counted among His followers, can take inspiration from His teachings, benefiting from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge will aid them in addressing the challenges they face. Indeed, the civilization that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone. Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society. It should be clear to everyone that the capacity created in the Bahá'í community over successive global Plans renders it increasingly able to lend assistance in the manifold and diverse dimensions of civilization building, opening to it new frontiers of learning.

In our Ridván 2008 message we indicated that, as the friends continued to labour at the level of the cluster, they would find themselves drawn further and further into the life of society and would be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which they are engaged to encompass a widening range of human endeavours. A rich tapestry of community life begins to emerge in every cluster as acts of communal worship, interspersed with discussions undertaken in the intimate setting of the home, are woven together with activities that provide spiritual education to all members of the population—adults, youth and children. Social consciousness is heightened naturally as, for example, lively conversations proliferate among parents regarding the aspirations of their children and service projects spring up at the initiative of junior youth. Once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established, the community's engagement with society can, and indeed must, increase. At this crucial point in the unfoldment of the Plan, when so many clusters are nearing such a stage, it seems appropriate that the friends everywhere would reflect on the nature of the contributions which their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this respect, it will prove fruitful to think in terms of

two interconnected, mutually reinforcing areas of activity: involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.

Over the decades, the Bahá'í community has gained much experience in these two areas of endeavour. There are, of course, a great many Bahá'ís who are engaged as individuals in social action and public discourse through their occupations. A number of non-governmental organizations, inspired by the teachings of the Faith and operating at the regional and national levels, are working in the field of social and economic development for the betterment of their people. Agencies of National Spiritual Assemblies are contributing through various avenues to the promotion of ideas conducive to public welfare. At the international level, agencies such as the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community are performing a similar function. To the extent necessary and desirable, the friends working at the grassroots of the community will draw on this experience and capacity as they strive to address the concerns of the society around them.

Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programmes of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly. Such endeavours are distinguished, then, by their stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare. That the world civilization now on humanity's horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá'í teachings. Clearly this ideal has profound implications for the nature of any social action pursued by Bahá'ís, whatever its scope and range of influence. Though conditions will vary from country to country, and perhaps from cluster to cluster, eliciting from the friends a variety of endeavours, there are certain fundamental concepts that all should bear in mind. One is the centrality of knowledge to social existence.

The perpetuation of ignorance is a most grievous form of oppression; it reinforces the many walls of prejudice that stand as barriers to the realization of the oneness of humankind, at once the goal and operating principle of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each individual according to his or her talents and abilities. Justice demands universal participation. Thus, while social action may involve the provision of goods and services in some form, its primary concern must be to build capacity within a given population to participate in creating a better world. Social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another. The scope and complexity of social action must be commensurate with the human resources available in a village or neighbourhood to carry it forward. Efforts best begin, then, on a modest scale and grow organically as capacity within the population develops. Capacity rises to new levels, of course, as the protagonists of social change learn to apply with increasing effectiveness elements of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, together with the contents and methods of science, to their social reality. This reality they must strive to read in a manner consistent with His teachings—seeing in their fellow human beings gems of inestimable value and recognizing the effects of the dual process of integration and disintegration on both hearts and minds, as well as on social structures.

Effective social action serves to enrich participation in the discourses of society, just as the insights gained from engaging in certain discourses can help to clarify the concepts that shape social action. At the level of the cluster, involvement in public discourse can range from an act as simple as introducing Bahá'í ideas into everyday conversation to more formal activities such as the preparation of articles and attendance at gatherings, dedicated to themes of social concern—climate change and the environment, governance and human rights, to mention a few. It entails, as well, meaningful interactions with civic groups and local organizations in villages and neighbourhoods.

In this connection, we feel compelled to raise a warning: It will be important for all to recognize that the value of engaging in social action and public discourse is not to be judged by the ability to bring enrolments. Though endeavours in these two areas of activity may well effect an increase in the size of the Bahá'í community, they are not undertaken for this purpose. Sincerity in this respect is an imperative. Moreover, care should be exercised to avoid overstating the Bahá'í experience or drawing undue attention to fledgling efforts, such as the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, which are best left to mature at their own pace. The watchword in all cases is humility. While conveying enthusiasm about their beliefs, the friends should guard against projecting an air of triumphalism, hardly appropriate among themselves, much less in other circumstances.

In describing for you these new opportunities now opening at the level of the cluster, we are not asking you to alter in any way your current course. Nor should it be imagined that such opportunities represent an alternative arena of service, competing with the expansion and consolidation work for the community's limited resources and energies. Over the coming year, the institute process and the pattern of activity that it engenders should continue to be strengthened, and teaching should remain uppermost in the mind of every believer. Further involvement in the life of society should not be sought prematurely. It will proceed naturally as the friends in every cluster persevere in applying the provisions of the Plan through a process of action, reflection, consultation and study, and learn as a result. Involvement in the life of society will flourish as the capacity of the community to promote its own growth and to maintain its vitality is gradually raised. It will achieve coherence with efforts to expand and consolidate the community to the extent that it draws on elements of the conceptual framework which governs the current series of global Plans. And it will contribute to the movement of populations towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a prosperous and peaceful world civilization to the degree that it employs these elements creatively in new areas of learning.

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Dear Friends: How often did the Beloved Master express the hope that the hearts of the believers would overflow with love for one another, that they would abide no lines of separation but would regard all of humanity even as one family. “See ye no strangers,” is His exhortation; “rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness.” All of the developments examined in the preceding pages are, at the most profound level, but an expression of universal love achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit. For is it not love for God that burns away all veils of estrangement and division and binds hearts together in perfect unity? Is it not His love that spurs you on in the field of service and enables you to see in every soul the capacity to know Him and to worship Him? Are you not galvanized by the knowledge that His Manifestation gladly endured a life of suffering out of His love for humanity? Look within your own ranks, at your dear Bahá’í brothers and sisters in Iran. Do they not exemplify fortitude born of the love of God and the desire to serve Him? Does not their capacity to transcend the cruelest and most bitter persecution bespeak the capacity of millions upon millions of oppressed people of the world to arise and take a decisive part in building the Kingdom of God on earth? Undeterred by divisive social constructs, press on and bring Bahá’u’lláh’s message to waiting souls in every urban neighbourhood, in every rural hamlet, in every corner of the globe, drawing them to His community, the community of the Greatest Name. Never do you leave our thoughts and prayers, and we will continue to implore the Almighty to reinforce you with His wondrous grace.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2011

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2011

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At the opening of this glorious season our eyes are brightened as we behold the newly unveiled brilliance of the gilded dome that crowns the exalted Shrine of the Báb. Restored to the supernal lustre intended for it by Shoghi Effendi, that august edifice once again shines out to land, sea, and sky, by day and by night, attesting the majesty and holiness of Him Whose hallowed remains are embosomed within.

This moment of joy synchronizes with the close of an auspicious chapter in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. Only a single decade remains of the first century of the Formative Age, the first hundred years to be spent beneath the benevolent shade of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Five Year Plan now ending is succeeded by another, the features of which have already been made the object of intense study across the Bahá'í world. Indeed, we could not be more gratified by the response to our message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and to the Riḍván message of twelve months ago. Not satisfied with a fragmentary grasp of their contents, the friends are returning to these messages again and again, singly and in groups, at formal meetings and spontaneous gatherings. Their understanding is enriched through active and informed participation in the programmes of growth being

nurtured in their clusters. Consequently, the Bahá'í community worldwide has consciously absorbed in a few months what it needs to propel it into a confident start to the coming decade.

Over the same period, cumulative instances of political upheaval and economic turmoil on various continents have shaken governments and peoples. Societies have been brought to the brink of revolution, and in notable cases over the edge. Leaders are finding that neither arms nor riches guarantee security. Where the aspirations of the people have gone unfulfilled, a store of indignation has accrued. We recall how pointedly Bahá'u'lláh admonished the rulers of the earth: "Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber." A word of caution: No matter how captivating the spectacle of the people's fervour for change, it must be remembered that there are interests which manipulate the course of events. And, so long as the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician is not administered, the tribulations of this age will persist and deepen. An attentive observer of the times will readily recognize the accelerated disintegration, fitful but relentless, of a world order lamentably defective.

Yet, discernible too is its counterpart, the constructive process that the Guardian associated with "the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" and described as "the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish." Its indirect effects can be seen in the outpouring of feeling, especially from the young, that springs from a longing to contribute to societal development. It is a bounty accorded to the followers of the Ancient Beauty that this longing, which wells up inexorably from the human spirit in every land, is able to find such eloquent expression in the work the Bahá'í community is carrying out to build capacity for effective action amongst the diverse populations of the planet. Can any privilege compare with this?

For insight into this work let every believer look to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the centenary of Whose "epoch-making journeys" to Egypt and the West is being marked at this time. Tirelessly, He expounded the teachings in every social space: in homes and mission halls, churches and

synagogues, parks and public squares, railway carriages and ocean liners, clubs and societies, schools and universities. Uncompromising in defence of the truth, yet infinitely gentle in manner, He brought the universal divine principles to bear on the exigencies of the age. To all without distinction—officials, scientists, workers, children, parents, exiles, activists, clerics, sceptics—He imparted love, wisdom, comfort, whatever the particular need. While elevating their souls, He challenged their assumptions, reoriented their perspectives, expanded their consciousness, and focused their energies. He demonstrated by word and deed such compassion and generosity that hearts were utterly transformed. No one was turned away. Our great hope is that frequent recollection, during this centennial period, of the Master's matchless record will inspire and fortify His sincere admirers. Set His example before your eyes and fix your gaze upon it; let it be your instinctive guide in your pursuit of the aim of the Plan.

At the inception of the Bahá'í community's first global Plan, Shoghi Effendi described in compelling language the successive stages by which the divine light had been kindled in the Síyáh-Chál, clothed in the lamp of revelation in Baghḏád, spread to countries in Asia and Africa even as it shone with added brilliancy in Adrianople and later in 'Akká, projected across the seas to the remaining continents, and by which it would be progressively diffused over the states and dependencies of the world. The final part of this process he characterized as the "penetration of that light . . . into all the remaining territories of the globe", referring to it as "the stage at which the light of God's triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet." Though that goal is far from being fulfilled, the light already blazes intensely in many a region. In some countries it shines in every cluster. In the land where that inextinguishable light was first ignited, it burns bright despite those who would snuff it out. In diverse nations it achieves a steady glow across whole neighbourhoods and villages, as candle after candle in heart after heart is lighted by the Hand of Providence; it illuminates thoughtful conversation at every level of human interaction; it casts its beams upon a myriad initiatives taken to promote the well-being of a people. And in every instance it radiates from a faithful believer, a vibrant community, a loving Spiritual Assembly—each a beacon of light against the gloom.

We pray earnestly at the Sacred Threshold that each one of you, bearers of the undying flame, may be surrounded by the potent confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh as you convey to others the spark of faith.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2012

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2012

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Mid-afternoon on the eleventh day of the Riḍván Garden festival one hundred years ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, standing before an audience several hundred strong, lifted a workman’s axe and pierced the turf covering the Temple site at Grosse Pointe, north of Chicago. Those invited to break the ground with Him on that spring day came from diverse backgrounds—Norwegian, Indian, French, Japanese, Persian, indigenous American, to name but a few. It was as if the House of Worship, yet unbuilt, was fulfilling the wishes of the Master, expressed on the eve of the ceremony, for every such edifice: “that humanity might find a place of meeting” and “that the proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness”.

His listeners on that occasion, and all who heard Him in the course of His travels to Egypt and the West, must have but dimly comprehended the far-reaching implications of His words for society, for its values and preoccupations. Still today, can anyone claim to have glimpsed anything but an intimation, distant and indistinct, of the future society to which the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is destined to give rise? For let none suppose that the civilization towards which the divine teachings impel humankind will follow merely from adjustments to the present order. Far from it. In a talk delivered some days after He laid the cornerstone of the Mother Temple of the West,

‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that “among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form,” that “the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs”. These, and countless other utterances of the Master to which the Bahá’í community is turning time and again in this centennial period, raise awareness of the distance that separates society as it is now arranged from the stupendous vision His Father gifted to the world.

Alas, notwithstanding the laudable efforts, in every land, of well-intentioned individuals working to improve circumstances in society, the obstacles preventing the realization of such a vision seem insurmountable to many. Their hopes founder on erroneous assumptions about human nature that so permeate the structures and traditions of much of present-day living as to have attained the status of established fact. These assumptions appear to make no allowance for the extraordinary reservoir of spiritual potential available to any illumined soul who draws upon it; instead, they rely for justification on humanity’s failings, examples of which daily reinforce a common sense of despair. A layered veil of false premises thus obscures a fundamental truth: The state of the world reflects a distortion of the human spirit, not its essential nature. The purpose of every Manifestation of God is to effect a transformation in both the inner life and external conditions of humanity. And this transformation naturally occurs as a growing body of people, united by the divine precepts, collectively seeks to develop spiritual capacities to contribute to a process of societal change. Akin to the hard earth struck by the Master a century ago, the prevailing theories of the age may, at first, seem impervious to alteration, but they will undoubtedly fade away, and through the “vernal showers of the bounty of God”, the “flowers of true understanding” will spring up fresh and fair.

We yield thanks to God that, through the potency of His Word, you—the community of His Greatest Name—are cultivating environments wherein true understanding can blossom. Even those enduring imprisonment for the Faith are, by their untold sacrifice and steadfastness, enabling the “hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom” to flower in sympathetic hearts. Across the globe, eager souls are being engaged in the work of constructing a new world through the

systematic implementation of the provisions of the Five Year Plan. So well have its features been grasped that we feel no need to comment further on them here. Our supplications, offered at the Threshold of an All-Bountiful Providence, are for the assistance of the Supreme Concourse to be vouchsafed to every one of you in contributing to the progress of the Plan. Our fervent desire, bolstered by witnessing your consecrated efforts during the past year, is that you will intensify your sure-footed application of the knowledge you are acquiring through experience. Now is not the time to hold back; too many remain unaware of the new dawn. Who but you can convey the divine message? “By God,” Bahá’u’lláh, referring to the Cause, affirms, “this is the arena of insight and detachment, of vision and upliftment, where none may spur on their chargers save the valiant horsemen of the Merciful, who have severed all attachment to the world of being.”

To observe the Bahá’í world at work is to behold a vista bright indeed. In the life of the individual believer who desires, above all, to invite others into communion with the Creator and to render service to humanity can be found signs of the spiritual transformation intended for every soul by the Lord of the Age. In the spirit animating the activities of any Bahá’í community dedicated to enhancing the capacity of its members young and old, as well as of its friends and collaborators, to serve the common weal can be perceived an indication of how a society founded upon divine teachings might develop. And in those advanced clusters where activity governed by the framework of the Plan is in abundance and the demands of ensuring coherence amongst lines of action are most pressing, the evolving administrative structures offer glimmerings, however faint, of how the institutions of the Faith will incrementally come to assume a fuller range of their responsibilities to promote human welfare and progress. Clearly, then, the development of the individual, the community, and the institutions holds immense promise. But beyond this, we note with particular joy how the relationships binding these three are marked by such tender affection and mutual support.

By contrast, relations among the three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society—reflect the discord that characterizes humanity’s turbulent stage of transition. Unwilling to act as interdependent parts of an

organic whole, they are locked in a struggle for power which ultimately proves futile. How very different the society which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in unnumbered Tablets and talks, depicts—where everyday interactions, as much as the relations of states, are shaped by consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Relationships imbued with this consciousness are being cultivated by Bahá’ís and their friends in villages and neighbourhoods across the world; from them can be detected the pure fragrances of reciprocity and cooperation, of concord and love. Within such unassuming settings, a visible alternative to society’s familiar strife is emerging. So it becomes apparent that the individual who wishes to exercise self-expression responsibly participates thoughtfully in consultation devoted to the common good and spurns the temptation to insist on personal opinion; a Bahá’í institution, appreciating the need for coordinated action channelled toward fruitful ends, aims not to control but to nurture and encourage; the community that is to take charge of its own development recognizes an invaluable asset in the unity afforded through whole-hearted engagement in the plans devised by the institutions. Under the influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, the relationships among these three are being endowed with new warmth, new life; in aggregate, they constitute a matrix within which a world spiritual civilization, bearing the imprint of divine inspiration, gradually matures.

The light of the Revelation is destined to illumine every sphere of endeavour; in each, the relationships that sustain society are to be recast; in each, the world seeks examples of how human beings should be to one another. We offer for your consideration, given its conspicuous part in generating the ferment in which so many people have recently been embroiled, the economic life of humanity, where injustice is tolerated with indifference and disproportionate gain is regarded as the emblem of success. So deeply entrenched are such pernicious attitudes that it is hard to imagine how any one individual can alone alter the prevailing standards by which the relationships in this domain are governed. Nevertheless, there are certainly practices a Bahá’í would eschew, such as dishonesty in one’s transactions or the economic exploitation of others. Faithful adherence to the divine admonitions demands there be no contradiction between one’s economic conduct and one’s beliefs as a Bahá’í. By applying in one’s life those principles of the Faith that relate to fairness and equity, a

single soul can uphold a standard far above the low threshold by which the world measures itself. Humanity is weary for want of a pattern of life to which to aspire; we look to you to foster communities whose ways will give hope to the world.

In our Ridván message of 2001, we indicated that in countries where the process of entry by troops was sufficiently well advanced and conditions in national communities were favourable, we would approve the establishment of Houses of Worship at the national level, whose emergence would become a feature of the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith. With exceeding joy we now announce that national Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs are to be raised up in two countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea. In these, the criteria we set are demonstrably met, and the response of their peoples to the possibilities created by the current series of Plans has been nothing short of remarkable. With the construction of the last of the continental temples in Santiago under way, the initiation of projects for building national Houses of Worship offers yet another gratifying evidence of the penetration of the Faith of God into the soil of society.

One more step is possible. The Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “one of the most vital institutions of the world”, weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá’í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the Plan, particularly the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity. The correlation of worship and service is especially pronounced in those clusters around the world where Bahá’í communities have significantly grown in size and vitality, and where engagement in social action is apparent. Some of these have been designated as sites for the dissemination of learning so as to nurture the friends’ ability to advance the junior youth programme in associated regions. The capacity to sustain this programme, as we have recently indicated, also fuels the development of study circles and children’s classes. Thus, beyond its primary purpose, the learning site fortifies the entire scheme of expansion and consolidation. It is within these clusters that, in the

coming years, the emergence of a local Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can be contemplated. Our hearts brimming with thankfulness to the Ancient Beauty, we rejoice to inform you that we are entering into consultations with respective National Spiritual Assemblies regarding the erection of the first local House of Worship in each of the following clusters: Battambang, Cambodia; Bihar Sharif, India; Matunda Soy, Kenya; Norte del Cauca, Colombia; and Tanna, Vanuatu.

To support the construction of the two national and five local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, we have decided to establish a Temples Fund at the Bahá'í World Centre for the benefit of all such projects. The friends everywhere are invited to contribute to it sacrificially, as their means allow.

Beloved co-workers: The ground broken by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá a hundred years ago is to be broken again in seven more countries, this being but the prelude to the day when within every city and village, in obedience to the bidding of Bahá'u'lláh, a building is upraised for the worship of the Lord. From these Dawning-Points of the Remembrance of God will shine the rays of His light and peal out the anthems of His praise.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2013

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2013

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

“The Book of God is wide open, and His Word is summoning mankind unto Him.” In such exhilarating terms does the Supreme Pen describe the advent of the day of union and ingathering. Bahá'u'lláh continues: “Incline your ears, O friends of God, to the voice of Him Whom the world hath wronged, and hold fast unto whatsoever will exalt His Cause.” He further exhorts His followers: “With the utmost friendliness and in a spirit of perfect fellowship take ye counsel together, and dedicate the precious days of your lives to the betterment of the world and the promotion of the Cause of Him Who is the Ancient and Sovereign Lord of all.”

Beloved co-workers: This stirring pronouncement comes to mind unbidden when we see your consecrated efforts around the world in answer to the call of Bahá'u'lláh. The splendid response to His summons can be witnessed on every side. To those who pause to reflect on the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, it becomes impossible to ignore how the power possessed by the Word of God is ascendant

in the hearts of women and men, children and youth, in country after country, in cluster after cluster.

A worldwide community is refining its ability to read its immediate reality, analyse its possibilities, and apply judiciously the methods and instruments of the Five Year Plan. As anticipated, experience is most rapidly accumulating in clusters where the frontiers of learning are being consciously advanced. In such places, the means for enabling an ever-rising number of individuals to strengthen their capacity for service are well understood. A vibrant training institute functions as the mainstay of the community's efforts to advance the Plan and, as early as possible, skills and abilities developed through participation in institute courses are deployed in the field. Some, through their everyday social interactions, encounter souls who are open to the exploration of spiritual matters carried out in a variety of settings; some are in a position to respond to receptivity in a village or neighbourhood, perhaps by having relocated to the area. Growing numbers arise to shoulder responsibility, swelling the ranks of those who serve as tutors, animators, and teachers of children; who administer and coordinate; or who otherwise labour in support of the work. The friends' commitment to learning finds expression through constancy in their own endeavours and a willingness to accompany others in theirs. Further, they are able to keep two complementary perspectives on the pattern of action developing in the cluster firmly in view: one, the three-month cycles of activity—the rhythmic pulse of the programme of growth—and the other, the distinct stages of a process of education for children, for junior youth, and for youth and adults. While understanding clearly the relationship that connects these three stages, the friends are aware that each has its own dynamics, its own requirements, and its own inherent merit. Above all, they are conscious of the operation of powerful spiritual forces, whose workings can be discerned as much in the quantitative data that reflect the community's progress as in the array of accounts that narrate its accomplishments. What is especially promising is that so many of these distinctive and salient features which characterize the clusters furthest advanced are also evident in communities at much earlier points in their development.

As the experience of the friends has deepened, their capacity for fostering within a cluster a rich and intricate pattern of life, embracing hundreds or even thousands of people, has risen. How pleased we are to note the many insights the believers are gaining from their endeavours. They appreciate, for instance, that the Plan's gradual unfoldment at the level of the cluster is a dynamic process, one that is necessarily complex and does not lend itself to ready simplification. They see how it moves forward as they increase their ability both to raise up human resources and to coordinate and organize well the actions of those who arise. The friends realize that as these capacities are enhanced, it becomes possible to integrate a wider range of initiatives. Equally, they have come to recognize that when a new feature is introduced it requires special attention for some time, but that this in no way diminishes the significance of other aspects of their community-building endeavours. For they understand that if learning is to be their mode of operation, they must be alert to the potential offered by any instrument of the Plan that proves to be especially suited to a particular point in time and, where called for, invest greater energy in its development; it does not follow, however, that every person must be occupied with the same aspect of the Plan. The friends have also learned that it is not necessary for the principal focus of the expansion phase of every cycle of a programme of growth to be directed towards the same end. Conditions may require that in a given cycle, as an example, attention be primarily aimed at inviting souls to embrace the Faith through intensive teaching efforts, undertaken as individuals or collectively; in another cycle, the focus could be on multiplying a specific core activity.

Furthermore, the friends are conscious that the work of the Cause proceeds at different speeds in different places and for good reason—it is, after all, an organic phenomenon—and they take joy and encouragement from every instance of progress they see. Indeed, they recognize the benefit that accrues from the contribution of each individual to the progress of the whole, and thus the service rendered by each one, in keeping with the possibilities created by a person's circumstances, is welcomed by all. Gatherings for reflection are increasingly seen as occasions where the community's efforts, in their entirety, are the subject of earnest and uplifting deliberation. Participants learn what has been accomplished overall, understand their own labours in that light, and enhance their knowledge about the

process of growth by absorbing the counsels of the institutions and drawing on the experience of their fellow believers. Such experience is also shared in numerous other spaces that are emerging for consultation amongst friends intensely engaged in specific endeavours, whether they are pursuing a common line of action or serving in a particular part of the cluster. All these insights are located in a wider appreciation that progress is most easily achieved in an environment imbued with love—one in which shortcomings are overlooked with forbearance, obstacles are overcome with patience, and tested approaches are embraced with enthusiasm. And so it is that, through the wise direction of institutions and agencies of the Faith functioning at every level, the friends' exertions, however modest individually, coalesce into a collective effort to ensure that receptivity to the call of the Blessed Beauty is identified quickly and nurtured effectively. A cluster in this condition is clearly one where the relationships among the individual, the institutions, and the community—the Plan's three protagonists—are evolving soundly.

From this landscape of thriving activity, one prospect deserves particular mention. In the message addressed to you three years ago, we expressed the hope that, in clusters with an intensive programme of growth in operation, the friends would endeavour to learn more about the ways of community building by developing centres of intense activity in neighbourhoods and villages. Our hopes have been exceeded, for even in clusters where the programme of growth has not yet achieved intensity, efforts by a few to initiate core activities among the residents of small areas have demonstrated their efficacy time and again. In essence, this approach centres on the response to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the part of populations who are ready for the spiritual transformation His Revelation fosters. Through participation in the educational process promoted by the training institute, they are motivated to reject the torpor and indifference inculcated by the forces of society and pursue, instead, patterns of action which prove life altering. Where this approach has advanced for some years in a neighbourhood or village and the friends have sustained their focus, remarkable results are becoming gradually but unmistakably evident. Youth are empowered to take responsibility for the development of those around them younger than themselves. Older generations welcome the contribution of the youth to meaningful discussions about the affairs of the whole community. For

young and old alike, the discipline cultivated through the community's educational process builds capacity for consultation, and new spaces emerge for purposeful conversation. Yet change is not confined merely to the Bahá'ís and those who are involved in the core activities called for by the Plan, who might reasonably be expected to adopt new ways of thinking over time. The very spirit of the place is affected. A devotional attitude takes shape within a broad sweep of the population. Expressions of the equality of men and women become more pronounced. The education of children, both boys and girls, commands greater attention. The character of relationships within families—moulded by assumptions centuries old—alters perceptibly. A sense of duty towards one's immediate community and physical environment becomes prevalent. Even the scourge of prejudice, which casts its baleful shadow on every society, begins to yield to the compelling force of unity. In short, the community-building work in which the friends are engaged influences aspects of culture.

While expansion and consolidation have steadily progressed over the past year, other important areas of activity have also moved forward, often in close parallel. As a prime example, the advances at the level of culture being witnessed in some villages and neighbourhoods are due in no small part to what is being learned from Bahá'í involvement in social action. Our Office of Social and Economic Development recently prepared a document which distils thirty years of experience that has accumulated in this field since that Office was established at the Bahá'í World Centre. Among the observations it makes is that efforts to engage in social action are lent vital impetus by the training institute. This is not simply through the rise in human resources it fosters. The spiritual insights, qualities, and abilities that are cultivated by the institute process have proven to be as crucial for participation in social action as they are for contributing to the process of growth. Further, it is explained how the Bahá'í community's distinct spheres of endeavour are governed by a common, evolving, conceptual framework composed of mutually reinforcing elements, albeit these assume varied expressions in different domains of action. The document we have described was lately shared with National Spiritual Assemblies, and we invite them, in consultation with the Counsellors, to consider how the concepts it explores can help to enhance existing efforts of social action pursued

under their auspices and raise consciousness of this significant dimension of Bahá'í endeavour. This should not be interpreted as a general call for widespread activity in this area—the emergence of social action happens naturally, as a growing community gathers strength—but it is timely that the friends reflect more deeply on the implications of their exertions for the transformation of society. The surge in learning that is occurring in this field places increased demands upon the Office of Social and Economic Development, and steps are being taken to ensure that its functioning evolves commensurately.

An especially notable feature of the last twelve months has been the frequency with which the Bahá'í community is being identified, in a wide variety of contexts, with efforts to bring about the betterment of society in collaboration with like-minded people. From the international arena to the grassroots of village life, leaders of thought in all kinds of settings have expressed their awareness that not only do Bahá'ís have the welfare of humanity at heart, but they possess a cogent conception of what needs to be accomplished and effective means for realizing their aspirations. These expressions of appreciation and support have also come from some previously unexpected quarters. For example, even in the Cradle of the Faith, despite formidable obstacles placed by the oppressor in their path, the Bahá'ís are increasingly recognized for the profound implications their message holds for the state of their nation and respected for their unbending determination to contribute to the progress of their homeland.

The suffering borne by the faithful in Iran, particularly in the decades since the most recent wave of persecutions began, has spurred their brothers and sisters in other countries to come to their defence. From among the invaluable endowments which, as a consequence of that endurance, the worldwide Bahá'í community has acquired, we mention one in this connection: an impressive network of specialized agencies at the national level that has proven capable of systematically developing relations with governments and organizations of civil society. Parallel to this, the processes of successive Plans have refined the community's ability to participate in prevalent discourses in every space where they occur—from

personal conversations to international forums. At the grassroots, involvement in this kind of endeavour builds naturally, through the same organic approach that characterizes the steady increase of the friends' engagement in social action, and no special attempt to stimulate it is necessary. At the national level, however, it is more often becoming the focus of attention for these same dedicated agencies already functioning in dozens of national communities, and it is proceeding according to the familiar and fruitful pattern of action, reflection, consultation, and study. To enhance such efforts, to facilitate learning in this domain, and to ensure that steps taken are coherent with the other endeavours of the Bahá'í community, we have recently established at the Bahá'í World Centre the Office of Public Discourse. We will call on it to assist National Spiritual Assemblies in this field by gradually promoting and coordinating activities and systematizing experience.

Encouraging progress is occurring in other areas as well. In Santiago, Chile, where the Mother Temple of South America is being erected, the building work continues apace. The concrete construction of the foundations, basement, and service tunnel is complete, as are the columns that will bear the superstructure. The anticipation associated with this project is growing, and a similar sense of expectation is stirring in the seven countries where national or local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs are to be raised up. In each one, preparations have commenced, and the contributions the believers are making to the Temples Fund have begun to be used; however, practical considerations, such as location, design, and resources, represent only one aspect of the work being undertaken by the friends. Fundamentally, theirs is a spiritual endeavour, one in which the whole community participates. The Master refers to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as "the lodestone of divine confirmations", "the mighty foundation of the Lord", and "the firm pillar of the Faith of God". Wherever it is established, it will naturally be an integral component of the process of community building that surrounds it. Already, in those places where a House of Worship is to appear, awareness of this reality is deepening among the rank and file of the believers, who recognize that their collective life must more and more reflect that union of worship and service which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár embodies.

On each front, then, we see the Bahá'í community moving steadily forward, advancing in understanding, eager to acquire insights from experience, ready to take on new tasks when resources make it possible, agile in its response to fresh imperatives, conscious of the need to ensure coherence among the various areas of activity in which it is engaged, wholly dedicated to the fulfilment of its mission. Its enthusiasm and devotion are apparent in the tremendous fervour generated by the announcement some two months ago of the convocation of 95 youth conferences throughout the world. We are gratified not only by the reaction of the youth themselves but also by the expressions of support voiced by their fellow believers, who appreciate how the younger followers of Bahá'u'lláh act as a vital stimulus to the entire body of the Cause.

We are filled with hope by the successive evidences we see of the spread of Bahá'u'lláh's message, the reach of its influence, and the growing awareness of the ideals it enshrines. In this season of anniversaries, we call to remembrance that "Day of supreme felicity", separated from this Ridván by a century and a half, when the Abhá Beauty first proclaimed His Mission to His companions in the Najíbíyyih Garden. From that sanctified spot, the Word of God has gone forth to every city and every shore, summoning humanity to an encounter with its Lord. And from that initial retinue of God-intoxicated lovers, a diverse community of purpose has blossomed, variegated flowers in the garden He has reared. With each passing day, rising numbers of newly awakened souls turn in supplication towards His Shrine, the place where we, in honour of that blessed Day and in gratitude for every bounty bestowed upon the community of the Greatest Name, bow our heads in prayer at the Sacred Threshold.

The Universal House of Justice

April 2014

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2014

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

A full three years have passed since the inception of the current stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, an undertaking that binds together the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in one united spiritual endeavour. Just two years separate the friends of God from its fixed conclusion. The two essential movements which continue to propel the process of growth—the steady flow of participants through the sequence of training institute courses and the movement of clusters along a continuum of development—have both been immensely reinforced by the outpouring of energy released at the youth conferences held last year. The expanded capacity the Bahá'í world has acquired for mobilizing large numbers of young people in the field of service can now yield further fruit. For in the time that remains, the critical tasks of strengthening existing programmes of growth and beginning new ones urgently beckon. The community of the Greatest Name is well positioned, before the expiration of this period, to add to the clusters where such programmes have already emerged the two thousand that remain of the goal.

How glad we are to see that this endeavour is being vigorously advanced across the far-flung regions of the globe, and in a diversity of circumstances and settings, in clusters already numbering some

three thousand. Many clusters are at a point where momentum is being generated through the implementation of a few simple lines of action. In others, after successive cycles of activity, the number of individuals taking initiative within the framework of the Plan has increased and the pitch of activity intensified; as the quality of the process of spiritual education is enhanced through experience, souls are more readily attracted to participate in it. From time to time, there may be a lull in activity or an obstacle to the way forward; searching consultation on the reasons for the impasse, combined with patience, courage, and perseverance, enables momentum to be regained. In more and more clusters, the programme of growth is increasing in scope and complexity, commensurate with the rising capacity of the Plan's three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—to create a mutually supportive environment. And we are delighted that, as anticipated, there are a growing number of clusters where a hundred or more individuals are now facilitating the engagement of a thousand or more in weaving a pattern of life, spiritual, dynamic, transformative. Underlying the process even from the start is, of course, a collective movement towards the vision of material and spiritual prosperity set forth by Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World. But when such large numbers are involved, the movement of an entire population becomes discernible.

This movement is especially in evidence in those clusters where a local Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is to be established. One such, by way of example, is in Vanuatu. The friends who reside on the island of Tanna have made a supreme effort to raise consciousness of the planned House of Worship, and have already engaged no less than a third of the island's 30,000 inhabitants in an expanding conversation about its significance in a variety of ways. The ability to sustain an elevated conversation among so many people has been refined through years of experience sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and extending the reach of a vibrant training institute. Junior youth groups on the island are particularly thriving, urged on by the support of village chiefs who see how the participants are spiritually empowered. Encouraged by the unity and dedication that exist among them, these young people have not only dispelled the languor of passivity in themselves but have, through various practical projects, found means to work for the betterment of their community, and as a result, those of all ages, not least their own parents, have been galvanized into constructive

action. Among the believers and the wider society, the bounty of being able to turn to a Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and for the resolution of difficult situations is being recognized, and in turn, the decisions of the Spiritual Assemblies are increasingly characterized by wisdom and sensitivity. There is much here to indicate that, when the elements of the Plan's framework for action are combined into a coherent whole, the impact on a population can be profound. And it is against the background of ongoing expansion and consolidation—the thirtieth cycle of the intensive programme of growth has recently concluded—that the friends are actively exploring, with the rest of the island's inhabitants, what it means for a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, a “collective centre for men's souls”, to be raised up in their midst. With the active support of traditional leaders, Tanna islanders have offered no less than a hundred design ideas for the Temple, demonstrating the extent to which the House of Worship has captured imaginations, and opening up enthralling prospects for the influence it is set to exert on the lives lived beneath its shade.

This heartening account has its counterpart in numerous advanced clusters where the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are being brought to bear on the conditions of life in neighbourhoods and villages. In each, a people, increasingly aware of the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, is learning, through reflection on experience, consultation, and study, how to act on the truths enshrined in His Revelation, such that the widening circle of spiritual kindred is ever more closely bound together by ties of collective worship and service.

In many ways, the communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow. Yet whatever the level of activity in a cluster, it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development. Everyone has a share in this enterprise; the contribution of each serves to enrich the whole. The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur—the nascent capacity that must be nurtured, the new skill that must be acquired, the initiators of a fledgling effort who must be accompanied, the space for reflection that must be cultivated,

the collective endeavour that must be coordinated—and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it. The very fact that each set of circumstances presents its own challenges is enabling every community not simply to benefit from what is being learned in the rest of the Bahá'í world but also to add to that body of knowledge. Awareness of this reality frees one from the fruitless search for a rigid formula for action while still allowing the insights gleaned in diverse settings to inform the process of growth as it takes a particular shape in one's own surroundings. This entire approach is completely at odds with narrow conceptions of “success” and “failure” that breed freneticism or paralyse volition. Detachment is needed. When effort is expended wholly for the sake of God then all that occurs belongs to Him and every victory won in His Name is an occasion to celebrate His praise.

So much in the Writings of our Faith describes the relationship between effort exerted and the heavenly aid vouchsafed in response: “If only ye exert the effort,” is the Master's reassurance in one of His Tablets, “it is certain that these splendours will shine out, these clouds of mercy will shed down their rain, these life-giving winds will rise and blow, this sweet-smelling musk will be scattered far and wide.” In our frequent visits to the Holy Shrines, we earnestly entreat the Almighty on your behalf that He may sustain and strengthen you, that your endeavours to reach out to those yet unacquainted with the divine teachings and confirm them in His Cause may be richly blessed, and that your reliance on His limitless favours may be unwavering. Never are you absent from our prayers, and never will we cease remembering in our supplications your consecrated acts of faithfulness. As we contemplate the imperatives that lie before the followers of the Blessed Beauty over the next two years, the Master's emphatic call to action is a spur to the spirit: “Tear asunder the veils, remove the obstacles, proffer the life-giving waters, and point out the path of salvation.”

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2015

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2015

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The resplendent season of Riḍván is at hand, and from the heights to which the community of the Greatest Name has attained, bright prospects are visible on the horizon. A vast terrain has been traversed: new programmes of growth have appeared, and while hundreds more must still emerge in the next twelve months, efforts to set in motion the necessary pattern of activity have already begun in almost every one of the clusters required to reach the 5,000 called for in the Five Year Plan. Existing programmes are gaining in strength, many showing more clearly what it means for the Cause of God to extend further into the social landscape across a cluster and within a neighbourhood or village. The paths that lead to sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation are being followed with firmer footsteps, valiant youth often setting the pace. Ways in which the society-building power of the Faith can find release in various settings are becoming more apparent, and those defining features that must come to mark the further unfoldment of the growth process in a cluster are becoming gradually discernible.

The call to carry out and support this work is directed to every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, and it will evoke a response in every heart that aches at the wretched condition of the world, the lamentable

circumstances from which so many people are unable to gain relief. For, ultimately, it is systematic, determined, and selfless action undertaken within the wide embrace of the Plan's framework that is the most constructive response of every concerned believer to the multiplying ills of a disordered society. Over the last year, it has become clearer still that, in different nations in different ways, the social consensus around ideals that have traditionally united and bound together a people is increasingly worn and spent. It can no longer offer a reliable defence against a variety of self-serving, intolerant, and toxic ideologies that feed upon discontent and resentment. With a conflicted world appearing every day less sure of itself, the proponents of these destructive doctrines grow bold and brazen. We recall the unequivocal verdict from the Supreme Pen: "They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light." Well-meaning leaders of nations and people of goodwill are left struggling to repair the fractures evident in society and powerless to prevent their spread. The effects of all this are not only to be seen in outright conflict or a collapse in order. In the distrust that pits neighbour against neighbour and severs family ties, in the antagonism of so much of what passes for social discourse, in the casualness with which appeals to ignoble human motivations are used to win power and pile up riches—in all these lie unmistakable signs that the moral force which sustains society has become gravely depleted.

Yet there is reassurance in the knowledge that, amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life is taking shape which gives practical expression to all that is heavenly in human beings. We have observed how, especially in those places where intensity in teaching and community-building activities has been maintained, the friends have been able to guard themselves against the forces of materialism that risk sapping their precious energies. Not only that, but in managing the various other calls upon their time, they never lose sight of the sacred and pressing tasks before them. Such attentiveness to the needs of the Faith and to humanity's best interests is required in every community. Where a programme of growth has been established in a previously unopened cluster, we see how the initial stirrings of activity arise out of the love for Bahá'u'lláh held in the heart of a committed believer. Notwithstanding the orders of complexity that must eventually be accommodated as a community grows in size, all activity begins with this simple strand of love. It is

the vital thread from which is woven a pattern of patient and concentrated effort, cycle after cycle, to introduce children, youth, and adults to spiritual ideas; to foster a feeling for worship through gatherings for prayer and devotion; to stimulate conversations that illuminate understanding; to start ever-growing numbers on a lifetime of study of the Creative Word and its translation into deeds; to develop, along with others, capacity for service; and to accompany one another in the exercise of what has been learned. Beloved friends, loved ones of the Abhá Beauty: We pray for you in earnest on every occasion we present ourselves at His Holy Threshold, that your love for Him may give you the strength to consecrate your lives to His Cause.

The rich insights arising from clusters, and from centres of intense activity within them, where the dynamics of community life have embraced large numbers of people deserve special mention. We are gratified to see how a culture of mutual support, founded on fellowship and humble service, has quite naturally established itself in such quarters, enabling more and more souls to be systematically brought within the pale of the community's activities. Indeed, in an increasing number of settings the movement of a population towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a new society appears no longer merely as an enthralling prospect but as an emerging reality.

We wish to address some additional words to those of you in whose surroundings marked progress is yet to occur and who long for change. Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes? Do not imagine that your own case is inherently any different. Change in a cluster, be it swift or hard won, flows neither from a formulaic approach nor from random activity; it proceeds to the rhythm of action, reflection, and consultation, and is propelled by plans that are the fruit of experience. Beyond this, and whatever its immediate effects, service to the Beloved is, in itself, a source of abiding joy to the spirit. Take heart, too, from the example of your spiritual kin in the Cradle of the Faith,

how their constructive outlook, their resilience as a community, and their steadfastness in promoting the Divine Word are bringing about change in their society at the level of thought and deed. God is with you, with each of you. In the twelve months that remain of the Plan, let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one.

The all-important work of expansion and consolidation lays a solid foundation for the endeavours the Bahá'í world is being called to undertake in numerous other spheres. At the Bahá'í World Centre, efforts are intensifying to methodically catalogue and index the content of the thousands of Tablets which constitute that infinitely precious bequest, the Holy Texts of our Faith, held in trust for the benefit of all humankind—this, so as to accelerate the publication of volumes of the Writings, both in their original languages and in English translation. Endeavours to establish eight Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, sacred Fanés raised up to the glory of God, continue apace. External affairs work at the national level has gained markedly in effectiveness and become increasingly systematic, further stimulated by the release of a document, sent to National Spiritual Assemblies six months ago, which draws on the considerable experience generated over the last two decades and provides an expanded framework for developing these endeavours in the future. Meanwhile, two new Offices of the Bahá'í International Community, sisters to its United Nations Office based in New York and Geneva and to its Office in Brussels, have been opened in Addis Ababa and Jakarta, broadening the opportunities for the perspectives of the Cause to be offered at the international level in Africa and Southeast Asia. Often prompted by the demands of growth, a range of National Assemblies are building up their administrative capacity, visible in their thoughtful stewardship of the resources available to them, their efforts to become intimately familiar with the conditions of their communities, and their vigilance in ensuring that the operations of their National Offices grow ever stronger; the need to systematize the impressive body of knowledge now accumulating in this area has led to the creation at the World Centre of the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems. Initiatives for social action of various kinds continue to multiply in many countries, enabling much to be learned about how the wisdom enshrined in the Teachings can be applied to improve social and economic circumstances; so promising

is this field that we have established a seven-member International Advisory Board to the Office of Social and Economic Development, introducing the next stage in the evolution of that Office. Three members of the Board will also serve as the Office's coordinating team and be resident in the Holy Land.

At this Ridván, then, while we see much to be done, we see many ready to do it. In thousands of clusters, neighbourhoods, and villages, fresh springs of faith and assurance are pouring forth, cheering the spirits of those touched by their reviving waters. In places, the flow is a steady stream, in some, already a river. Now is not the moment for any soul to linger upon the bank—let all lend themselves to the onward surge.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2016

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2016

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

With the advent of the King of Festivals, the period of preparation for the next global Plan is over: we now summon the friends of God to a new five-year commitment of courage, resolve, and resources.

The company of Bahá'u'lláh's faithful stands poised. Institutional gatherings convened across the world in recent months have sent out successive signals of eagerness to begin this mighty enterprise. The imperatives contained in the message addressed to the Counsellors' Conference are already being translated into decisive plans of action. Decades of heroic endeavour have shaped the community and earned it a measure of proven ability in fostering growth, steeling it for this moment. The last two decades, in particular, have markedly accelerated this longed-for rise in proficiency.

During this period, the adoption of an evolving framework for action has enabled the friends to progressively nurture and refine essential capacities, giving rise to simple acts of service at first, leading to more elaborate patterns of action, which in turn demanded the development of capacities still more complex. In this way, a systematic process of human resource development and community

building has been started in thousands of clusters—and, in many of them, become far advanced. The focus has not been solely on the individual believer, or the community, or the institutions of the Faith; all three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order are being stimulated by the spiritual forces released through the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The signs of their progress are more and more apparent: in the confidence that countless believers have acquired to share accounts of Bahá'u'lláh's life and discuss the implications of His Revelation and peerless Covenant; in the growing contingents of souls who, as a result, have been attracted to His Cause and are contributing to the achievement of His unifying vision; in the ability of Bahá'ís and their friends, at the very grassroots of the community, to describe in eloquent terms their experience of a process capable of transforming character and shaping social existence; in the significantly larger numbers of those indigenous to a country who, as members of Bahá'í institutions and agencies, are now guiding the affairs of their communities; in the reliable, generous, and sacrificial giving to the Fund, so vital for sustaining the advancement of the Faith; in the unprecedented efflorescence of individual initiative and collective action in support of community-building activities; in the enthusiasm of so many selfless souls in the prime of youth who are bringing immense vigour to this work, notably by tending to the spiritual education of younger generations; in the enhancement of the devotional character of the community through regular gatherings for worship; in the rise in capacity at all levels of Bahá'í administration; in the readiness of institutions, agencies, and individuals to think in terms of process, to read their immediate reality and assess their resources in the places where they live, and to make plans on that basis; in the now familiar dynamic of study, consultation, action, and reflection that has cultivated an instinctive posture of learning; in the mounting appreciation for what it means to give effect to the Teachings through social action; in the multiplying opportunities being sought and seized to offer a Bahá'í perspective on discourses prevalent in society; in the awareness of a global community that, in all its endeavours, it is hastening the emergence of divine civilization by manifesting the society-building power inherent in the Cause; indeed, in the friends' growing consciousness that their efforts to foster inner transformation, to widen the circle of unity, to collaborate with others in the field of service, to help populations take charge of their own spiritual, social, and economic development—and,

through all such efforts, to bring about the betterment of the world—express the very purpose of religion itself.

While no single measure can capture the totality of the Bahá'í community's progress, much can be inferred from the number of clusters worldwide where a programme of growth has been established, which, with gratitude for the bounties bestowed by the Abhá Beauty, we confirm has surpassed 5,000. So broad a foundation as this was a prerequisite for taking on the task that now confronts the Bahá'í world—strengthening the process of growth in every cluster where it has begun and extending further an enriching pattern of community life. The sustained effort required will be arduous. But the outcome has the potential to be profoundly significant, even epoch making. Small steps, if they are regular and rapid, add up to a great distance travelled. By concentrating on the advance that must be made in a cluster in an initial period—for instance, in the six cycles occurring before the first of the bicentennial anniversaries—the friends will do much to bring their goal for the full five years within reach. In each cycle are vested fleeting opportunities for a stride forward, precious possibilities that will not return.

In society at large, alas, the symptoms of an ever-deepening malaise of the soul multiply and worsen. How striking that, as the peoples of the world suffer for want of the true remedy and turn fitfully from one false hope to another, you are collectedly refining an instrument that connects hearts with the Word of God eternal. How striking that, amid the cacophony of fixed opinions and opposing interests that grows everywhere more fierce, you are focused on drawing people together to build communities that are havens of unity. Far from disheartening you, let the world's prejudices and hostilities be reminders of how urgently souls all around you need the healing balm that you alone can present to them.

This is the last in a series of consecutive Five Year Plans. At its close, a new phase in the evolution of the Divine Plan will open, set to propel the community of Bahá'u'lláh towards the third century of the Bahá'í Era. May the friends of God in every country appreciate

the promise of these few years ahead, which will be rigorous preparation for the even mightier tasks yet to come. The present Plan's broad scope enables every individual to support this work, however humble one's share. We ask you, cherished co-workers, adorers of Him Who is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, to spare no effort in applying all you have learned and every God-given ability and skill you possess to advance the Divine Plan into its next essential stage. To your own ardent supplications for heavenly assistance we add ours, offered in the Holy Shrines, on behalf of all who labour for this all-encompassing Cause.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2017

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 2017

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

See how the community of the Greatest Name arises! With but one year elapsed since the inception of the new Plan, reports testify to the scale of what is being attempted and beginning to be accomplished. Bringing greater intensity to 5,000 programmes of growth is demanding a level of effort quite without precedent. With a firm grasp of the fundamentals of the Plan, large numbers of the friends are acting on its requirements, demonstrating rigour and sacrifice in the quality of their response. As envisaged, some intensive programmes of growth that have been long sustained are becoming reservoirs of knowledge and resources, lending support to surrounding areas and facilitating the rapid dissemination of experience and insight. Centres of intense activity—those neighbourhoods and villages where the community-building work is most concentrated—are proving to be fertile ground for collective transformation. An expanded and invigorated legion of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are stimulating the endeavours of the believers, helping them acquire a vision of how to advance the growth process in various circumstances and identifying approaches that suit the conditions in each cluster. Supported by their respective National Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils are learning how the momentum of the Plan can be built across a range of clusters simultaneously, while in some smaller countries without Councils, new entities at the national level are starting to do the same. Although, as would be expected of any

organic process, the swift progress being witnessed in some places is yet to appear in others, the total number of intensive programmes of growth in the world is already beginning to mount. Further, we rejoice to see that participation in the activities of the Plan surged markedly during its first four cycles.

The signs could hardly be more promising, then, for what the coming year might bring. And what could be more fitting to offer the Blessed Beauty on the two hundredth anniversary of His Birth than the earnest striving of His loved ones to extend the reach of His Faith? The first of the two bicentenaries to be celebrated by the Bahá'í world is thus an occasion with prospects most thrilling. Viewed aright, this year presents the single greatest worldwide opportunity there has ever been for connecting hearts to Bahá'u'lláh. In the months ahead, let all be mindful of this precious chance and alert to the possibilities that exist in every space for acquainting others with His life and sublime mission. For the teaching opportunity that is now before the Bahá'í world to be seized to its fullest extent, creative thought needs to be given to the conversations that could unfold with every kind of person. In the course of such meaningful conversations, perception is heightened and hearts are opened—sometimes immediately. In this worthy occupation all find a calling, and of the joy that comes from being engaged in this work none should deprive themselves. We entreat the one Beloved that the whole of this bicentennial year may be filled with this joy that is purest and sweetest: telling another soul of the dawning of the Day of God.

The obligations that must be met by the company of the faithful are made the more pressing by the confusion, distrust, and cloudiness in the world. Indeed, the friends should use every opportunity to shine a light that can illuminate the way and offer assurance to the anxious, hope to the despairing. We are reminded of the counsel given by the Guardian to one Bahá'í community in words that seem intended for our own time: “As the fabric of present-day society heaves and cracks under the strain and stress of portentous events and calamities, as the fissures, accentuating the cleavage separating nation from nation, class from class, race from race, and creed from creed, multiply, the prosecutors of the Plan must evince a still

greater cohesion in their spiritual lives and administrative activities, and demonstrate a higher standard of concerted effort, of mutual assistance, and of harmonious development in their collective enterprises.” Always emphasizing the spiritual significance of the work of the Faith and the single-minded resolve with which the believers are to discharge their sacred duties, Shoghi Effendi warned too against having any share in political controversies, entanglements, and bickerings. “Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship,” he urged on another occasion, “above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world.” These are the inevitable foam and spray cast up as wave after wave convulses a turbulent and divided society. Too much is at stake to be occupied with distractions of this kind. As every follower of Bahá’u’lláh knows well, humanity’s ultimate well-being is dependent upon its differences being transcended and its unity firmly established. Every contribution Bahá’ís make to the life of their society is aimed at fostering unity; every community-building endeavour is directed towards the same end. For those tired of contention, the communities growing under the shadow of the Greatest Name offer a potent example of what unity can achieve.

We render praise to the Lord of Lords at seeing so many of His loved ones, in so many ways, giving their all that the banner of the oneness of humankind may be raised aloft. Most cherished friends: As a highly auspicious year now commences, might not each one of us contemplate what heavenly deeds His grace may aid us to perform?

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2018

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2018

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We greet you in the enduring afterglow of those memorable events that marked the bicentenary of the Birth of the Blessed Beauty. As we consider what transpired then and since, we find that the global Bahá'í community now in view is not the same as when it embarked on the first six cycles of the current Plan. It is more conscious than ever before of its mission. It has experienced an unprecedented surge in its capacity to bring friends and acquaintances into contact with its community life; to inspire neighbourhoods and villages into unified endeavour; to articulate how spiritual truths can be translated into sustained practical action; and, above all, to converse not only about the teachings that will build the world anew, but about the One Who taught them: Bahá'u'lláh. Accounts of His life and of His suffering told in myriad tongues by adults, youth, and children touched countless hearts. Some showed themselves ready to explore His Cause further. Others pledged collaboration. And many a receptive soul was moved to an avowal of faith.

One telling indicator of progress was the numerous places where it became clear that the Faith had emerged from obscurity at the national level. There were government leaders and leaders of thought who stated publicly—and sometimes emphasized privately—that the world stands in need of Bahá'u'lláh's vision and that the Bahá'ís' endeavours are admired and should be expanded. It delighted us to

see that it was not only Bahá'ís who wished to honour Bahá'u'lláh and celebrate His life—special gatherings were hosted by some from beyond the Bahá'í community. In areas where hostility to the Faith exists, the friends were undismayed; showing marvellous resilience, they encouraged their compatriots to examine the truth for themselves, and many joyfully participated in the festivities. The bicentenary also gave rise to a seemingly limitless efflorescence of artistic expression, magnificent testimony to the wellspring of love from which it stemmed. The character of the Bahá'í community's entire approach to this occasion was confirmation of how much has been learned over more than two decades now, since the current series of global Plans began. The individual believer took initiative, the community arose in collective effort, and the friends channelled their creative energy into the plans prepared by the institutions. A significant anniversary, marking the passage of two centuries, offered a powerful stimulus to the work of building communities for the century to come. In the period leading up to the second bicentenary, let every seed so lovingly sown at the first be nurtured patiently towards fruition.

Two years into the present Plan, although naturally progress is not uniform from country to country, the number of intensive programmes of growth in the world is approaching half the five thousand contemplated in the current global endeavour, and the rate at which this number is rising has been steadily increasing. Looking more closely, there are promising signs of how the powers and potentialities of individuals, communities, and institutions are being manifested. For the believers everywhere, the experience of the bicentenary celebration demonstrated that many of their day-to-day interactions with the people around them can be infused with the spirit of teaching. And as the work in thousands of villages and neighbourhoods gathers momentum, a vibrant community life is taking root in each. The number of clusters where the system for extending this pattern of activity to more and more locations is becoming well established—enabling, thereby, the friends to pass the third milestone along a continuum of development—has grown markedly. And it is here, at the frontiers of the Bahá'í world's learning, particularly in the movement of populations towards the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, where not only are large numbers coming into the widening embrace of Bahá'í activities but the friends are now

learning how sizeable groups come to identify themselves with the community of the Most Great Name. We are seeing the Faith's educational efforts take on a more formal character in such places, as children move seamlessly through the grades year after year and one level of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme reliably succeeds another. In these places, the training institute is learning to ensure that sufficient human resources are being raised up to provide for the spiritual and moral edification of children and junior youth in ever-increasing numbers.

Participation in these foundational activities is becoming so embedded in the culture of the population that it is viewed as an indispensable aspect of the life of a community. A new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development, and they build immunity to those societal forces that breed passivity. Possibilities for material and spiritual progress take shape. Social reality begins to transform.

Cherished friends, this is truly a moment to give thanks to the Best-Beloved. There are a great many reasons to be encouraged. Yet we are only too aware of the scale of the task that remains. Fundamentally, as we have previously indicated, there must emerge in many hundreds of clusters a growing band of believers who can maintain, with those around them, a sustained focus on nurturing growth and building capacity, and who are distinguished by their ability and their discipline to reflect on action and learn from experience. Raising up and accompanying an expanding nucleus of individuals in each place—not just at the level of the cluster but within neighbourhoods and villages—is at once a formidable challenge and a critical need. But where this is occurring, the results speak for themselves.

We are reassured to see that the institutions of the Faith are keeping this supreme need at the forefront of their thinking, devising effective mechanisms to enable the insights arising from progress to be widely applied. At the same time, greater experience is endowing national, regional, and local bodies alike with broader vision. They are becoming involved in all aspects of the community's development

and are concerned with the well-being of people beyond its formal membership. Conscious of the profound implications the institute process holds for the advancement of peoples, they are paying particular attention to how the training institute can be strengthened. They remain mindful of the need to maintain the community's focus on the requirements of the Plan and call the ever-widening circle of friends to higher and higher levels of unity. They faithfully uphold their responsibility to refine their administrative and financial systems so that the work of expansion and consolidation can be properly supported. In all this, they are ultimately occupied with cultivating in the community those conditions that conduce to the release of powerful spiritual forces.

As the work of community building intensifies, the friends are using the new capacities they have developed to improve conditions in the society around them, their enthusiasm kindled by their study of the divine teachings. Short-term projects have soared in number, formal programmes have expanded their reach, and there are now more Bahá'í-inspired development organizations engaged in education, health, agriculture, and other areas. From the resulting transformation visible in the individual and collective lives of peoples may be discerned the unmistakable stirrings of the society-building power of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. No wonder, then, that it is from such instances of social action—whether simple or complex, of fixed duration or long sustained—that the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community are increasingly taking inspiration in their efforts to participate in the prevalent discourses of society. This is another important field of endeavour for the Faith that has advanced well. At the national level, contributions to discourses that are meaningful to that society—the equality of men and women, migration and integration, the role of youth in social transformation, and religious coexistence, among others—are being made with growing confidence, proficiency, and insight. And wherever they live, work, or study, believers of all ages and backgrounds are making valued contributions to particular discourses, bringing to the attention of those around them a principled perspective shaped by Bahá'u'lláh's vast Revelation.

The Faith's standing in various spaces in which discourses unfold has been much enhanced by its official presence on the World Wide Web, a presence which has expanded considerably through the launch of numerous national Bahá'í websites and the further development of the family of sites associated with Bahai.org. This has immense value for both the propagation and protection of the Cause. Over the span of just a few days a large global audience was attracted to carefully conceived content about the Faith that was presented on the bicentenary website and updated in nine languages simultaneously, and which has now been augmented by individual country pages illustrating the diversity of the celebrations that occurred. Plans are already far advanced for introducing to the Bahá'í Reference Library site a feature that will allow previously untranslated and unpublished passages or Tablets from the Holy Writings to be released online over time. As well as this, new volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings rendered into English are set to appear in the coming years.

In Santiago, Chile, and Battambang, Cambodia, the world's most recently dedicated Houses of Worship are becoming established centres of attraction, beacons to their societies of all that the Faith stands for. And their number is about to grow. We are delighted to announce that the dedication ceremony for the Temple in Norte del Cauca, Colombia, is to take place in July. Further, the construction of more Houses of Worship lies just over the horizon. In Vanuatu, permission is being obtained to start building. In India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a highly complex and exacting process has at last led to the successful acquisition of land. The joy at seeing the design of the first national Mashriqu'l-Adhkár unveiled in Papua New Guinea at Naw-Rúz had hardly subsided when the design of the local House of Worship in Kenya was also revealed. Meanwhile, we have every expectation that the recently released statement and compilation about the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, prepared by our Research Department, will further stimulate the friends' appreciation of the significance of worship in community life. For in their acts of service, especially in their regular devotional gatherings, Bahá'ís everywhere are laying the spiritual foundations of future Houses of Worship.

Only three years remain of a quarter-century effort that began in 1996 focused on a single goal: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. At Ridván 2021, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will embark on a Plan lasting a single year. Brief, but pregnant with portent, this one-year endeavour will begin a new wave of Plans bearing the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá'í Era. During the course of this auspicious twelvemonth, the Bahá'í world's commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will include a special gathering at the Bahá'í World Centre to which representatives of every National Spiritual Assembly and every Regional Bahá'í Council will be invited. This, however, is to be but the first in a sequence of events that will prepare the believers for the demands of the decades to come. The following January, the elapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of the Master's Will and Testament will be the occasion for a conference in the Holy Land bringing together the Continental Boards of Counsellors and all members of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation. The spiritual energy released at these two historic gatherings must then be carried to all the friends of God in every land in which they reside. For this purpose, a series of conferences will be convened worldwide in the months that follow, a catalyst to the multi-year endeavour that shall succeed the coming One Year Plan.

Thus, a new phase in the unfoldment of the Master's Divine Plan is approaching. But a thrilling and more immediate prospect lies directly ahead. The bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb is now just a year and a half away. This is a period in which to recall the extraordinary heroism of the Martyr-Herald of our Faith, Whose dramatic ministry thrust humanity into a new era of history. Though separated from our own time by two centuries, the society in which the Báb appeared resembles the present-day world for the sense of oppression and for the longing of so many to find answers to slake the soul's thirst to know. In considering how this two-hundred-year anniversary might befittingly be marked, we recognize that these festivities will have a special character of their own. Nevertheless, we anticipate a flourishing of activity no less rich and no less inclusive than that which accompanied the bicentenary just passed. It is an occasion to which every community, every household, every heart will undoubtedly look forward with eager expectation.

The months ahead will also be a time for calling to mind the lives of the Báb's intrepid followers—heroines and heroes whose faith was expressed in matchless, sacrificial acts that will forever adorn the annals of the Cause. Their qualities of fearlessness, consecration, and detachment from all save God impress themselves upon everyone who learns of their ventures. How striking, too, is the young age at which so many of those lionhearts made their indelible mark on history. During the coming period, may their example give courage to the entire company of the faithful—not least to the youth, who are once more summoned to the vanguard of a movement aimed at nothing less than the transformation of the world.

This, then, is our bright, bright hope. In the six cycles that lie between this Ridván and the next bicentenary—indeed, throughout the remaining three years of the current Plan—let the same all-consuming, all-surpassing love that spurred the Báb's disciples to the diffusion of the divine light inspire you to great deeds. That you may be the recipients of heavenly aid is our supplication at the Sacred Threshold.

[Signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2019

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2019

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

As the Most Great Festival has drawn closer, we have been transported by feelings of gratitude and anticipation—gratitude for the wonders that Bahá'u'lláh has enabled His followers to accomplish, anticipation of what the immediate future holds.

The momentum generated by the worldwide celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh has only grown since. The accelerated development of the Bahá'í community, its rising capacity, and its ability to draw on the energies of more of its members emerge vividly from a summary of its recent global attainments. Of these, an increase in community-building activities stands out in particular. The current Five Year Plan follows twenty years of effort by the Bahá'í world to systematically refine and multiply these activities—but remarkably, in the Plan's first two and a half years, the number of core activities alone rose by more than half. The worldwide community has shown the capacity to engage, at any given time, over a million people in such activities, helping them to explore and respond to spiritual realities. In the same short period, the number of gatherings for prayer nearly doubled—a much-needed response to humanity's growing estrangement from the Source of hope and bounty. This development holds special promise, for devotional

meetings infuse a new spirit into the life of a community. Interwoven with educational efforts for all ages, they reinforce the lofty purpose of those efforts: to foster communities distinguished by their worship of God and their service to humankind. Nowhere is this more evident than in those clusters where the participation of large numbers in Bahá'í activities is being sustained and the friends have passed the third milestone in their community's development. We are delighted to see that the number of clusters where the process of growth has advanced this far has already more than doubled since the beginning of the Plan and now stands at around five hundred.

This brief survey cannot do justice to the scale of the transformation that is under way. The outlook for the remaining two years of the Plan is bright. Much has been achieved this last year by widely disseminating lessons learned from the stronger programmes of growth in clusters that, as we hoped, have become reservoirs of knowledge and resources. The International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors, and their tireless auxiliaries have stopped at nothing to ensure that friends in all parts of the world can benefit from this acceleration in learning and apply the insights being gained to their own realities. We rejoice to see that in a growing number of clusters, and in neighbourhoods and villages within them, a nucleus of friends has emerged who through action and reflection are discovering what is required, at a particular point, for the process of growth to advance in their surroundings. They are drawing on the potent instrument of the institute, through which capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of the community is enhanced, and as they act, the number of those joining them is increasing. Naturally, conditions vary greatly from place to place, as do the characteristics of growth. But through systematic striving, everyone can make a more and more effective contribution to the work at hand. In every setting, there is pure joy in engaging other souls in meaningful and uplifting conversations that lead, whether quickly or gradually, to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. The brighter the flame kindled within the heart of the believer, the greater will be the force of attraction felt by those exposed to its warmth. And to a heart consumed with love for Bahá'u'lláh, what more fitting occupation can be imagined than to seek out kindred spirits, to encourage them as they enter the path of service, to accompany them as they gain experience and—perhaps the greatest joy of all—to see souls become confirmed in their faith, arise

independently, and assist others on the same journey. These are among the most cherished of all the moments that this transitory life affords.

The prospects for advancing this spiritual enterprise are made the more thrilling by the approach of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Like the bicentenary that preceded it, this anniversary is a moment incalculably precious. It provides all Bahá'ís with marvellous opportunities for awakening those around them to the great Day of God, to the extraordinary effusion of heavenly grace signalled by the appearance of two Manifestations of the Divine Being, successive Luminaries Who brightened the horizon of the world. The measure of what might be possible in the coming two cycles is known to all from the experience of the bicentenary two years ago, and all that was learned on that occasion must be channelled into the plans for the Twin Holy Birthdays this year. As the two-hundred-year anniversary draws near, we will offer frequent supplications on your behalf in the Sacred Shrines, praying that your efforts to befittingly honour the Báb will succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold.

The close of the first century of the Formative Age is but two and a half years away. It will seal one hundred years of consecrated effort to consolidate and expand the foundation so sacrificially laid during the Faith's Heroic Age. At that time the Bahá'í community will also mark the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that moment when the beloved Master was released from the confines of this world to rejoin His Father in the retreats of celestial glory. His funeral, which occurred the following day, was an event "the like of which Palestine had never seen". At its conclusion, His mortal remains were laid to rest within a vault of the Mausoleum of the Báb. However, it was envisaged by Shoghi Effendi that this would be a temporary arrangement. A Shrine was to be erected, of a character befitting the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at the appropriate time.

That time has come. The Bahá'í world is being summoned to build the edifice which will forever embosom those sacred remains. It is to be constructed in the vicinity of the Ridván Garden, on land

consecrated by the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty; the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will thus lie on the crescent traced between the Holy Shrines in ‘Akká and Haifa. Work on the architectural plans is advancing, and more information will be shared in the coming months.

Feelings of surpassing joy now surge within us, as we contemplate the year ahead and all that it promises. We look to every one of you—those who are occupied with rendering service to Bahá’u’lláh, labouring in every nation for the cause of peace—to fulfil your high calling.

[signed: The Universal House of
Justice]

April 2020

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2020

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Two emerging realities have prompted us to address these words to you. The first reality is the growing consciousness around the world of the looming and appalling dangers carried by the coronavirus pandemic. In many countries, despite valiant and determined collective efforts to avert disaster, the situation is already grave, creating tragedies for families and individuals and plunging whole societies into crisis. Waves of suffering and sorrow are breaking over one place after another, and will weaken different nations, at different moments, in different ways.

The second reality, one that is daily more apparent, is the resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world in the face of a challenge which has no likeness in living memory. Your response has been outstanding. When we wrote to you a month ago at Naw-Rúz, we were keen to stress the impressive qualities being demonstrated by communities whose normal pattern of activity had been disrupted. All that has transpired in the intervening weeks, during which many friends have had to comply with increasingly stringent restrictions,

has only deepened our feelings of admiration. Learning from the experience gained in other parts of the world, some communities have found safe and creative ways to raise awareness of public health requirements within populations. Special attention is being paid to those who are most at risk from the virus and the economic hardship arising from its spread; the initiatives featured on the Bahá'í World News Service in this regard are but a mere handful of the countless number under way. These are being complemented by efforts to examine, promote, and cultivate those spiritual qualities which are most needed at this time. Many such efforts are necessarily taking place in family units or in solitude, but where conditions allow or communication tools make it possible, a sense of extraordinary solidarity is being actively nurtured among souls sharing similar circumstances. The dynamics of community life, so important for collective progress, will not be subdued.

Our spirits have been lifted by seeing how capably National Spiritual Assemblies, the unflagging generals of the Army of Light, have guided their communities and shaped their response to the crisis. They have been strongly supported by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries who, as always, have heroically raised aloft the standard of loving service. While staying well informed about the often rapidly changing conditions in their countries, Assemblies have made the necessary arrangements for administering the affairs of the Cause, and in particular for conducting elections, where these remain feasible. Through regular communications, institutions and agencies have offered wise counsel, comforting reassurance, and constant encouragement. In many instances, they have also started to identify constructive themes that are emerging from the discourses opening up in their societies. The expectation we expressed in our Naw-Rúz message that this test of humanity's endurance would grant it greater insight is already being realized. Leaders, prominent thinkers, and commentators have begun to explore fundamental concepts and bold aspirations that, in recent times, have been largely absent from public discourse. At present these are but early glimmerings, yet they hold out the possibility that a moment of collective consciousness may be in view.

The comfort we take at seeing the resilience of the Bahá'í world manifest itself in action is tempered by our sadness at the consequences of the pandemic for humanity. Alas, we are conscious that the believers and their associates also share in this suffering. The distance from friends and relations that, owing to the requirements of public safety, so many people in the world are now maintaining will, for some, give way to permanent separation. At each dawn it seems certain that more agonies will be endured before the set of sun. May the promise of reunion in the eternal realms offer solace to those who lose loved ones. We pray for the relief of their hearts, and for the grace of God to surround those whose education, livelihoods, homes, or even their very means of sustenance are being put at risk. For you, and for those you cherish, and for all your compatriots, we supplicate Bahá'u'lláh and beseech His blessings and favour.

However long and arduous the road that must be travelled, we are supremely confident in your fortitude and your determination to see the journey through. You draw from stores of hope, faith, and magnanimity, putting the needs of others before your own, enabling those who are deprived to be spiritually nourished, those who increasingly thirst for answers to be satisfied, and those who long to work for the betterment of the world to be offered the means. From the devoted followers of the Blessed Perfection, how could we expect less?

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2021

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2021

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The final words in a most memorable chapter in the history of the Cause have now been written, and the page turns. This Riḍván marks the conclusion of an extraordinary year, of a Five Year Plan, and of an entire series of Plans that began in 1996. A new series of Plans beckons, with what promises to be a momentous twelve months serving as a prelude to a nine-year effort due to commence next Riḍván. We see before us a community that has rapidly gained strength and is ready to take great strides forward. But there must be no illusions about how much striving was required to reach this point and how hard-won were the insights acquired along the way: the lessons learned will shape the community's future, and the account of how they were learned sheds light on what is to come.

The decades leading up to 1996, rich with advances and insights of their own, had left no doubt that large numbers of people in many societies would be ready to enter under the banner of the Faith. Yet, as encouraging as instances of large-scale enrolment were, they did not equate to a sustainable process of growth that could be cultivated in diverse settings. Profound questions faced the community which, at that time, it had insufficient experience to answer adequately. How could efforts aimed at its expansion proceed hand in hand with the process of consolidation and resolve the long-standing, seemingly intractable challenge of sustaining growth? How could individuals,

institutions and communities be raised up that would be capable of translating Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into action? And how could those who were attracted to the teachings become protagonists in a global spiritual enterprise?

So it was that, a quarter of a century ago, a Bahá'í community that could still count three Hands of the Cause of God in its front ranks embarked on a Four Year Plan, distinguished from those that came before it by its focus on a single aim: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This aim came to define the series of Plans that followed. The community had already come to understand that this process was not just the entry into the Faith of sizeable groups, nor would it emerge spontaneously; it implied purposeful, systematic, accelerated expansion and consolidation. This work would require the informed participation of a great many souls, and in 1996, the Bahá'í world was summoned to take up the vast educational challenge this entailed. It was called to establish a network of training institutes focused on generating an increasing flow of individuals endowed with the necessary capacities to sustain the process of growth.

The friends set about this task aware that, notwithstanding their previous victories in the teaching field, plainly they had much to learn about which capacities to acquire and, crucially, how to acquire them. In many ways, the community would learn by doing, and the lessons it learned, once they had been distilled and refined by being applied in diverse settings over time, would eventually be incorporated into educational materials. It was recognized that certain activities were a natural response to the spiritual needs of a population. Study circles, children's classes, devotional meetings, and later junior youth groups stood out as being of central importance in this regard, and when woven together with related activities, the dynamics generated could give rise to a vibrant pattern of community life. And as the numbers participating in these core activities grew, a new dimension was added to their original purpose. They came to serve as portals through which youth, adults and whole families from the wider society could come into an encounter with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It was also becoming apparent how practical it was to consider strategies for the work of community building within the

context of the “cluster”: a geographic area of manageable size with distinct social and economic features. A capacity for preparing simple plans at the level of the cluster began to be cultivated, and out of such plans, programmes for the growth of the Faith arose, organized into what would become three-month cycles of activity. An important point of clarity emerged early on: the movement of individuals through a sequence of courses gives impetus to, and is perpetuated by, the movement of clusters along a continuum of development. This complementary relationship helped the friends everywhere to assess the dynamics of growth in their own surroundings and chart a path towards increased strength. As time went on, it proved fruitful to view what was occurring in a cluster both from the perspective of three educational imperatives—serving children, junior youth, and youth and adults—as well as from the perspective of the cycles of activity essential to the rhythm of growth. Part-way into a twenty-five-year endeavour, many of the most recognizable features of the growth process we see today were becoming well established.

As the efforts of the friends intensified, various principles, concepts and strategies of universal relevance to the growth process began to crystallize into a framework for action that could evolve to accommodate new elements. This framework proved fundamental to the release of tremendous vitality. It assisted the friends to channel their energies in ways that, experience had shown, were conducive to the growth of healthy communities. But a framework is not a formula. By taking into account the various elements of the framework when assessing the reality of a cluster, a locality, or simply a neighbourhood, a pattern of activity could be developed that drew on what the rest of the Bahá’í world was learning while still being a response to the particulars of that place. A dichotomy between rigid requirements on the one hand and limitless personal preferences on the other gave way to a more nuanced understanding of the variety of means by which individuals could support a process that, at its heart, was coherent and continually being refined as experience accumulated. Let there be no doubt about the advance represented by the emergence of this framework: the implications for harmonizing and unifying the endeavours of the entire Bahá’í world and propelling its onward march were of great consequence.

As one Plan succeeded another, and engagement with the work of community building became more broadly based, advances at the level of culture became more pronounced. For instance, the importance of educating the younger generations became more widely appreciated, as did the extraordinary potential represented by junior youth in particular. Souls assisting and accompanying one another along a shared path, constantly widening the circle of mutual support, became the pattern to which all efforts aimed at developing capacity for service aspired. Even the interactions of the friends among themselves and with those around them underwent a change, as awareness was raised of the power of meaningful conversations to kindle and fan spiritual susceptibilities. And significantly, Bahá'í communities adopted an increasingly outward-looking orientation. Any soul responsive to the vision of the Faith could become an active participant—even a promoter and facilitator—of educational activities, meetings for worship and other elements of the community-building work; from among such souls, many would also declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Thus, a conception of the process of entry by troops emerged that relied less on theories and assumptions and more on actual experience of how large numbers of people could find the Faith, become familiar with it, identify with its aims, join in its activities and deliberations, and in many cases embrace it. Indeed, as the institute process was strengthened in region after region, the number of individuals taking a share in the work of the Plan, extending even to those recently acquainted with the Faith, grew by leaps and bounds. But this was not being driven by a mere concern for numbers. A vision of personal and collective transformation occurring simultaneously, founded on study of the Word of God and an appreciation of each person's capacity to become a protagonist in a profound spiritual drama, had given rise to a sense of common endeavour.

One of the most striking and inspiring features of this twenty-five-year period has been the service rendered by Bahá'í youth, who with faith and valour have assumed their rightful place in the forefront of the community's efforts. As teachers of the Cause and educators of the young, as mobile tutors and homefront pioneers, as cluster coordinators and members of Bahá'í agencies, youth on five continents have arisen to serve their communities with devotion and sacrifice. The maturity they have demonstrated, in the discharge of

duties upon which depends the advancement of the Divine Plan, is expressive of their spiritual vitality and their commitment to safeguarding humanity's future. In recognition of this increasingly evident maturity, we have decided that, immediately following this Ridván, while the age at which a believer becomes eligible to serve on a Spiritual Assembly shall remain twenty-one, the age at which a believer may vote in Bahá'í elections shall be lowered to eighteen.

We have no doubt that Bahá'í youth everywhere who are of age will vindicate our confidence in their ability to fulfil "conscientiously and diligently" the "sacred duty" to which every Bahá'í elector is called.

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We are conscious that, naturally, the realities of communities differ greatly. Different national communities, and different places within those communities, began this series of Plans at different points of development; since then, they have also developed at different speeds and have attained different levels of progress. This, in itself, is nothing new. It has always been the case that conditions in places vary, as does the degree of receptivity found there. But we perceive, too, a swelling tide, whereby the capacity, confidence and accumulated experience of most communities are rising, buoyed by the success of their sister communities near and far. As an example, while souls who arose to open a new locality in 1996 lacked nothing for courage, faith and devotion, today their counterparts everywhere combine those same qualities with knowledge, insights and skills that are the accumulation of twenty-five years of effort by the entire Bahá'í world to systematize and refine the work of expansion and consolidation.

Regardless of a community's starting point, it has advanced the process of growth when it has combined qualities of faith, perseverance and commitment with a readiness to learn. In fact, a cherished legacy of this series of Plans is the widespread recognition that any effort to advance begins with an orientation towards learning. The simplicity of this precept belies the significance of the implications that follow from it. We do not doubt that every cluster, given time, will progress along the continuum of development; the

communities that have advanced most quickly, relative to those whose circumstances and possibilities were similar, have shown an ability to foster unity of thought and to learn about effective action. And they did so without hesitating to act.

A commitment to learning also meant being prepared to make mistakes—and sometimes, of course, mistakes brought discomfort. Unsurprisingly, new methods and approaches were handled inexpertly at first because of a lack of experience; on occasion, a newly acquired capacity of one kind was lost as a community became absorbed in developing another. Having the best of intentions is no guarantee against making missteps, and moving past them requires both humility and detachment. When a community has remained determined to show forbearance and learn from mistakes that naturally occur, progress has never been out of reach.

Midway through the series of Plans, the community's involvement in the life of society began to become the focus of more direct attention. The believers were encouraged to think of this in terms of two interconnected areas of endeavour—social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society. These, of course, were not alternatives to the work of expansion and consolidation, much less distractions from it: they were inherent within it. The greater the human resources a community could call on, the greater became its capacity to bring the wisdom contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to bear upon the challenges of the day—to translate His teachings into reality. And the troubled affairs of humankind over this period seemed to underline how desperate was its need for the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician. Implied in all this was a conception of religion very different from those holding sway in the world at large: a conception which recognized religion as the potent force propelling an ever-advancing civilization. It was understood that such a civilization would also not appear spontaneously, of its own accord—it was the mission of Bahá'u'lláh's followers to labour for its emergence. Such a mission demanded applying the same process of systematic learning to the work of social action and engagement in public discourse.

Viewed from the perspective of the last two and a half decades, the capacity for undertaking social action has risen markedly, leading to an extraordinary efflorescence of activity. Compared with 1996, when some 250 social and economic development projects were being sustained from year to year, there are now 1,500, and the number of Bahá'í-inspired organizations has quadrupled to surpass 160. More than 70,000 grassroots social action initiatives of short duration are being undertaken each year, a fifty-fold increase. We look forward to a continued rise in all these endeavours resulting from the dedicated support and stimulus now provided by the Bahá'í International Development Organization. Meanwhile, Bahá'í participation in the prevalent discourses of society has also grown immensely. Besides the many occasions when the friends find they can offer a Bahá'í perspective in conversations that occur in a work or personal context, more formal participation in discourses has significantly advanced. We have in mind not only the much-expanded efforts and increasingly sophisticated contributions of the Bahá'í International Community—which in this period added Offices in Africa, Asia and Europe—but also the work of a vastly augmented, greatly fortified network of national Offices of External Affairs, for whom this area of endeavour became the principal focus; in addition, there were insightful and notable contributions made by individual believers to specific fields. All this goes some way towards explaining the esteem, appreciation and admiration which leaders of thought and other prominent figures at all levels of society have again and again expressed for the Faith, its followers and their activities.

In reviewing the entire twenty-five-year period, we are awed by the many kinds of progress the Bahá'í world has made concurrently. Its intellectual life has thrived, as demonstrated not only by its advances in all the areas of endeavour already discussed, but also by the volume of high-quality literature published by Bahá'í authors, by the development of spaces for the exploration of certain disciplines in the light of the teachings, and by the impact of the undergraduate and graduate seminars systematically offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, which, in collaboration with the institutions of the Cause, now serves Bahá'í youth from well over 100 countries. Efforts to raise up Houses of Worship have very visibly accelerated. The last Mother Temple was erected in Santiago, Chile, and projects to build two national and five local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs were

initiated; the Houses of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia, and Norte del Cauca, Colombia, have already opened their doors. Bahá'í Temples, whether newly dedicated or long established, are increasingly occupying a position at the heart of community life. The material support offered by the rank and file of the believers for the myriad endeavours undertaken by the friends of God has been unstinting. Simply viewed as a measure of collective spiritual vitality, the generosity and sacrifice with which, at a time of considerable economic upheaval, the critical flow of funds has been maintained—nay, invigorated—is most telling. In the realm of Bahá'í administration, the capacity of National Spiritual Assemblies to manage the affairs of their communities in all their growing complexity has been considerably enhanced. They have benefited in particular from new heights of collaboration with the Counsellors, who have been instrumental in systematizing the gathering of insights from the grassroots across the world and ensuring they are widely disseminated. This was also the period in which the Regional Bahá'í Council emerged as a fully fledged institution of the Cause, and in 230 regions now, Councils and those training institutes they oversee have proved themselves indispensable for advancing the process of growth. To extend into the future the functions of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was established in 2005; today it coordinates the efforts of no less than 33 National and Regional Boards of Trustees that now compass the globe, which in turn guide the work of over 1,000 Representatives. The developments which occurred at the Bahá'í World Centre during this same period are many: witness the completion of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and two buildings on the Arc and the commencement of the construction of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, not to mention a host of projects to strengthen and preserve the precious Holy Places of the Faith. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and the Shrine of the Báb were recognized as World Heritage sites, places of inestimable significance for humanity. The public flocked to these sacred locations in their hundreds of thousands, approaching one and a half million in some years, and the World Centre regularly welcomed hundreds of pilgrims at once, sometimes more than 5,000 in a year, along with a similar number of Bahá'í visitors; we are delighted as much by the raised numbers as by the scores of different peoples and nations represented among those who partake of the

bounty of pilgrimage. The translation, publication and dissemination of the Sacred Texts has also been greatly accelerated, in parallel with the development of the Bahá'í Reference Library, one of the most notable members of the growing family of websites associated with Bahai.org, which itself is now available in ten languages. A variety of offices and agencies have been established, situated at the World Centre and elsewhere, charged with supporting the process of learning unfolding across multiple areas of endeavour throughout the Bahá'í world. All this, our sisters and brothers in faith, is but a fraction of the tale we could recount of what your devotion to Him Who was the Wronged One of the World has brought forth. We can but echo the poignant words once voiced by the beloved Master when, overcome with emotion, He cried out: "O Bahá'u'lláh! What hast Thou done?"

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From the panorama of a pivotal quarter century, we now direct our focus to the most recent Five Year Plan, a Plan quite unlike any that has gone before in a variety of ways. In this Plan we urged the Bahá'ís of the world to draw on all that they had learned in the previous twenty years and put it to full effect. We are delighted that our hopes in this regard were more than met, but while we would naturally expect great things from the followers of the Blessed Beauty, the character of what was achieved through their herculean efforts was truly breathtaking. It was the capstone to an accomplishment twenty-five years in the making.

The Plan was especially memorable for being trisected by two sacred bicentenaries, each of which galvanized local communities the world over. The company of the faithful demonstrated, on a scale never previously witnessed and with relative ease, a capacity to engage people from all sections of society in honouring the life of a Manifestation of God. It was a powerful indicator of something broader: the ability to channel the release of tremendous spiritual energies for the advancement of the Cause. So magnificent was the response that in many places the Faith was propelled out of obscurity at the national level. In settings where it was unexpected, perhaps

unlooked for, marked receptivity to the Faith became apparent. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands were transported by their encounter with a devotional spirit that is today characteristic of Bahá'í communities everywhere. The vision of what is made possible by observing a Bahá'í Holy Day was immeasurably expanded.

The achievements of the Plan, simply in numerical terms, quickly eclipsed those of all the Plans that had preceded it since 1996. At the start of this Plan, the capacity existed for conducting just over 100,000 core activities at a given time, a capacity that was the fruit of twenty years of common endeavour. Now, 300,000 core activities are being sustained at once. Participation in those activities has risen above two million, which is also close to a threefold increase. There are 329 national and regional training institutes in operation, and their capacity is evidenced by the fact that three-quarters of a million people have been enabled to complete at least one book of the sequence; overall, the number of courses completed by individuals is now also two million—a rise of well over a third in five years.

The increased intensity with which programmes of growth around the world are being pursued tells an impressive story of its own. In this five-year span, we had called for growth to be accelerated in every one of the 5,000 clusters where it had begun. This imperative became the impetus for earnest endeavour throughout the world. As a result, the number of intensive programmes of growth more than doubled and now stands at approximately 4,000. Difficulties involved in opening up new villages and neighbourhoods to the Faith in the midst of a global health crisis, or expanding activities that were at an early stage when the pandemic began, prevented an even higher total from being reached during the Plan's final year. However, there is more to tell than this. At the outset of the Plan, we had expressed the hope that the number of clusters where the friends had passed the third milestone along a continuum of growth, as a consequence of learning how to welcome large numbers into the embrace of their activities, would grow by hundreds more. That total then stood at around 200, spread across some 40 countries. Five years on, this number has risen to an astonishing 1,000 in nearly 100 countries—a quarter of all the intensive programmes of growth in the world and an achievement far

surpassing our expectations. And yet even these figures do not reveal the loftiest heights to which the community has soared. There are over 30 clusters where the number of core activities being sustained exceeds 1,000; in places, the total is several thousand, involving the participation of more than 20,000 people in a single cluster. A growing number of Local Spiritual Assemblies now oversee the unfoldment of educational programmes that cater to practically all the children and junior youth in a village; the same reality is beginning to emerge within a few urban neighbourhoods. Engagement with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has, in notable instances, transcended individuals, families and extended kinships—what is being witnessed is the movement of populations towards a common centre. At times, age-old hostilities between opposing groups are being left behind, and certain social structures and dynamics are being transformed in the light of the divine teachings.

We cannot but be overjoyed at advances so impressive. The society-building power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is being manifested with ever more clarity, and this is a firm foundation upon which the coming Nine Year Plan will build. Clusters of marked strength, as had been hoped, have proven to be reservoirs of knowledge and resources for their neighbours. And regions where more than one such cluster exist have more easily developed the means to accelerate growth in cluster after cluster. We feel compelled to stress again, however, that progress has been near universal; the difference in progress between one place and another is of degree. The community's collective understanding of the process of entry by troops and its confidence in being able to stimulate this process under any set of circumstances have risen to levels that were unimaginable in decades past. The profound questions that had loomed for so long, and which were brought into sharp focus in 1996, have been convincingly answered by the Bahá'í world. There is a generation of believers whose entire lives bear the imprint of the community's progress. But the sheer scale of what has occurred in those many clusters where the frontiers of learning are being extended has turned a significant advance in the process of entry by troops into a momentous one of historic proportions.

Many will be familiar with how the Guardian divided the Ages of the Faith into consecutive epochs; the fifth epoch of the Formative Age began in 2001. Less well known is that the Guardian also made specific reference to there being epochs of the Divine Plan, and stages within those epochs. Held in abeyance for two decades while local and national organs of the Administrative Order were being raised up and strengthened, the Divine Plan conceived by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was formally inaugurated in 1937 with the commencement of the first stage of its first epoch: the Seven Year Plan assigned by the Guardian to the North American Bahá’í community. This first epoch closed after the conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963, which had resulted in the banner of the Faith being planted across the world. The opening stage of the second epoch was the first Nine Year Plan, and no less than ten Plans have followed in its wake, Plans that have ranged in duration from twelve months to seven years. At the dawn of this second epoch, the Bahá’í world was already witnessing the earliest beginnings of that entry into the Faith by troops that had been foreseen by the Author of the Divine Plan; in the succeeding decades, generations of devoted believers within the community of the Greatest Name have laboured in the Divine Vineyard to cultivate the conditions required for sustained, large-scale growth. And at this glorious season of Ridván, how abundant are the fruits of those labours! The phenomenon of sizeable numbers swelling the activities of the community, catching the spark of faith and swiftly arising to serve at the leading edge of the Plan has moved from being a forecast sustained by faith to a recurring reality. Such a pronounced and demonstrable advance demands to be marked in the annals of the Cause. With elated hearts, we announce that the third epoch of the Master’s Divine Plan has begun. Stage by stage, epoch after epoch shall His Plan unfold, until the light of the Kingdom illumines every heart.

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Beloved friends, no review of the five-year enterprise that concluded the second epoch of the Divine Plan would be complete without special reference to the upheavals that accompanied its final year and which persist still. The restrictions on personal interaction that waxed and waned in most countries over this period could have dealt

the community's collective efforts a severe blow, recovery from which might have taken years, but there are two reasons why this was not the case. One was the widespread consciousness of the duty of Bahá'ís to serve humanity, never more so than in times of peril and adversity. The other was the extraordinary rise in capacity in the Bahá'í world to give expression to that consciousness. Accustomed over many years to adopting patterns of systematic action, the friends brought their creativity and sense of purpose to bear on an unforeseen crisis, while ensuring that the new approaches they developed were coherent with the framework they had laboured in successive Plans to perfect. This is not to overlook the serious hardships being endured by Bahá'ís, like their compatriots in every land; yet throughout severe difficulties, the believers have remained focused. Resources have been channelled to communities in need, elections went ahead wherever possible, and in all circumstances the institutions of the Cause have continued to discharge their duties. There have even been bold steps forward. The National Spiritual Assembly of São Tomé and Príncipe will be re-established this Ridván, and two new pillars of the Universal House of Justice will be raised up: the National Spiritual Assembly of Croatia, with its seat in Zagreb, and the National Spiritual Assembly of Timor-Leste, with its seat in Dili.

And so the One Year Plan begins. Its purpose and requirements have already been set out in our message sent on the Day of the Covenant; this Plan, though brief, will suffice to prepare the Bahá'í world for the Nine Year Plan that is to follow. A period of special potency, which opened one hundred years after the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, will soon close with the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, marking the conclusion of the first century of the Formative Age and the start of the second. The company of the faithful enter this new Plan at a time when humanity, chastened by the exposure of its vulnerability, seems more conscious of the need for collaboration to address global challenges. Yet, lingering habits of contest, self-interest, prejudice and closed-mindedness continue to hinder the movement towards unity, despite growing numbers in society who are showing in words and deeds how they, too, yearn for greater acceptance of humanity's inherent oneness. We pray that the family of nations may succeed in putting aside its differences in the interests of the common good. Notwithstanding the uncertainties that shroud the months ahead, we entreat Bahá'u'lláh to make the

confirmations that have sustained His followers for so long more abundant still, that you may be carried forward in your mission, your composure undisturbed by the turbulence of a world whose need for His healing message is ever more acute.

The Divine Plan enters a new epoch and a new stage. The page is turned.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2022

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2022

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

A year of preparation and reflection, as well as of great exertion, has concluded, distinguished by the efforts of the friends worldwide to mark the centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, including by sending representatives to participate in a special event honouring Him in the Holy Land. Through these efforts, the inspiration offered by the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been felt by countless souls and not only Bahá'ís. His concern for every member of the human family, His teaching work, His promotion of undertakings for education and social well-being, His profound contributions to discourses in both the East and the West, His heartfelt encouragement of projects to construct Houses of Worship, His shaping of early forms of Bahá'í administration, His cultivation of varied aspects of community life—all these complementary facets of His life were a reflection of His constant and complete dedication to serving God and serving humanity. Beyond being a towering figure of moral authority and surpassing spiritual insight, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a pure channel through which the forces released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh could act upon the world. To comprehend the society-building power possessed by the Faith, one need look no further than the achievements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His ministry and the transformative effects of the guidance that flowed unceasingly from His pen. So many of the marvellous advances made by the present-day Bahá'í community—which were surveyed in our message to you

last Ridván—trace their origins to the actions, decisions, and directions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

How fitting, then, that the Bahá’í community’s collective tribute to its perfect Exemplar should form the prelude to its commencement of a major undertaking focused on the release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The areas of endeavour that fall within the scope of the Nine Year Plan, and of the current series of Plans, are directed towards the fulfilment of this overarching objective. It is also the focus of the more than 10,000 conferences being held across the globe to mark the launch of this great spiritual enterprise. These conferences, expected to welcome unprecedented numbers of participants, are bringing together not only Bahá’ís but many other well-wishers of humanity who share with them a longing to foster unity and better the world. Their determination and strong sense of purpose are reflected in the spirit generated at the gatherings that have already occurred, where the participants have been galvanized as much by the dynamic consultations to which they have contributed as by the collective vision explored at these joyful events. We look with eager anticipation to what the coming months and years will bring.

Since we addressed our 30 December 2021 message to the Counsellors’ Conference, National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá’í Councils have been earnestly assessing the possibilities for intensifying the process of growth in the clusters within their jurisdiction during the Nine Year Plan. We feel it would be helpful, for the purpose of gauging the progress made over time, to view the Plan as unfolding in two phases of four and five years’ duration, and National Assemblies were invited to consider the advances they expect to see in their respective communities by Ridván 2026 and then by Ridván 2031. This exercise also involved a re evaluation of cluster boundaries, and the outcome of these adjustments is that the total number of clusters in the world has risen by a quarter and now stands at over 22,000. Judging by the forecasts received, it is estimated that, by the end of the Plan, a programme of growth at some level of development will exist in around 14,000 of these clusters. From among them, the number where the programme of growth could be considered intensive is projected to climb to 11,000

over the same time period. And of these, it is anticipated that the number of clusters where the third milestone has been passed will rise above 5,000 by 2031. Without question, to make such advances will entail colossal effort over the entire duration of the Plan. Yet we find these to be worthy aspirations towards which to strive, for they represent an ambitious but serious appraisal of what lies within reach.

This is telling. Such objectives could not be realistically contemplated if administrative institutions and agencies had not evolved markedly, endowing them with significantly heightened capacity to manage the affairs of a community whose activities have multiplied so quickly, embracing a vast and growing number of kindred souls. It would not be possible to aspire to such growth if a desire to learn—to act, to reflect, to capture insights, and to absorb the insights emerging elsewhere—had not been cultivated at all levels, extending to the grassroots of the community. And the effort implied by such projections would hardly be feasible if a systematic approach to the teaching work and to human resource development had not become increasingly manifest in the Bahá'í world. All this has brought about an advance in the Bahá'í community's awareness of its own identity and purpose. A determination to be outward looking in the process of community building had already become an established aspect of culture in many, many places; it has now blossomed, in a rising number of communities, into a sense of real responsibility for the spiritual and material progress of larger and larger groups within society, well beyond the membership of the Bahá'í community itself. The efforts of the friends to build communities, to engage in social action, and to contribute to the prevalent discourses of society have cohered into one global enterprise, bound together by a common framework for action, focused on helping humanity to establish its affairs on a foundation of spiritual principles. The significance of the developments we have described, reaching this point one hundred years after the inauguration of the Administrative Order, cannot be overlooked. In the extraordinary rise in capacity that has occurred in the last two decades—and which has made it possible for the Bahá'í world to view its endeavours in terms of the release of the society-building power of the Faith—we see incontrovertible evidence that the Cause of God has entered the sixth epoch of its Formative Age. We announced last Ridván that the widespread phenomenon of large

numbers participating in Bahá'í activities, being kindled by faith, and acquiring the skills and abilities to serve their communities signalled that the third epoch of the Master's Divine Plan had commenced; thus, the One Year Plan, at its inception then and at its conclusion now, has come to mark a set of historic advances made by the company of the faithful. And at the threshold of a new, mighty undertaking, this united body of believers stands ready to seize the possibilities wide open before it.

A prominent feature of the epoch that now ends was the erection of the last of the continental Houses of Worship and the initiation of projects to establish Houses of Worship at the national and local levels. Much has been learned, by Bahá'ís the world over, about the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and the union of worship and service it embodies. During the sixth epoch of the Formative Age, much more will be learned about the path that leads from the development within a community of a flourishing devotional life—and the service which it inspires—to the appearance of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Consultations are beginning with various National Spiritual Assemblies, and as these proceed, we will periodically announce places where a Bahá'í House of Worship will be raised up in the coming years.

Our joy at seeing the community of the Greatest Name go from strength to strength is tempered by our deep sorrow at seeing the persistence of conditions and conflicts in the world that create misery and desperate suffering—in particular, at observing the recrudescence of destructive forces that have disordered international affairs while visiting horrors upon populations. We know well and are reassured that, as Bahá'í communities have repeatedly demonstrated in many different contexts, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are committed to offering relief and support to those around them, no matter how straitened their own circumstances. But until humanity as a whole undertakes to establish its affairs on foundations of justice and truth, it is, alas, fated to stagger from one crisis to another. We pray that, if the recent outbreak of war in Europe is to yield any lessons for the future, it will serve as an urgent reminder of the course that the world must take if it is to attain genuine and enduring peace. The principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh to the monarchs and presidents of His

time, and the weighty responsibilities with which He charged rulers past and present, are perhaps even more pertinent and imperative today than when they were first recorded by His Pen. For Bahá'ís, the inexorable advance of the Major Plan of God—bringing with it ordeals and upheavals, but ultimately impelling humanity towards justice, peace, and unity—is the context within which the Minor Plan of God, with which the believers are chiefly occupied, unfolds. The dysfunctional state of present-day society makes the need for the release of the society-building power of the Faith abundantly clear and pressing. We cannot but expect that, for now, convulsions and disturbances will continue to afflict the world; you will no doubt appreciate, then, why every earnest supplication we offer for all God's children to be relieved from bewilderment and bitter hardship is coupled with an equally heartfelt prayer for the success of the much-needed service you are rendering for the Cause of the Prince of Peace.

In every cluster where the activities of the Plan are gaining momentum, we see the development of communities with the noble characteristics we described in the 30 December 2021 message. As societies experience stresses of various kinds, the followers of the Abhá Beauty must stand out more and more for their qualities of resilience and rationality, for their standard of conduct and their adherence to principle, and for the compassion, detachment, and forbearance they demonstrate in their pursuit of unity. Time and again, the distinctive characteristics and attitudes shown by the believers in periods of acute difficulty have prompted people to turn to Bahá'ís for explanation, counsel, and support, especially when the life of a society has been upset by peril and unforeseen disruptions. In sharing these observations, we are mindful that the Bahá'í community itself also experiences the effects of the forces of disintegration at work in the world. Moreover, we are conscious that the greater the friends' efforts to promote the Word of God, the stronger the countervailing forces they will encounter, sooner or later, from various quarters. They must fortify their minds and spirits against the tests that are sure to come, lest these impair the integrity of their endeavours. But the believers know well that whatever storms lie ahead, the ark of the Cause is equal to them all. Successive stages of its voyage have seen it weather the elements and ride the waves. Now it is bound for a new horizon. The confirmations of the

Almighty are the gusts that fill its sails and propel it towards its destination. And the Covenant is its lodestar, keeping the sacred vessel set on its sure and certain course. May the hosts of heaven send blessings upon all who sail within.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

April 2023

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2023

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We feel tremendous joy to be addressing a community whose high-mindedness and high resolve are befitting of its high calling. How great, how very great is our love for you, and how our spirits soar as we see your sincere and devoted striving to live lives shaped by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and to proffer the life-giving waters of His Revelation to a world that is sore athirst. Your strong sense of purpose is plain to see. Expansion and consolidation, social action, and participation in the discourses of society proceed apace, and the natural coherence of these undertakings at the level of the cluster is becoming ever more visible. Nowhere is this clearer than in places where growing numbers are becoming engaged in a range of endeavours, each one a means to release the society-building power of the Faith.

In the twelve months that have elapsed since the commencement of the Nine Year Plan, we have been delighted to see how this global spiritual enterprise has inspired and galvanized the friends and given impetus to particular lines of action. An immediate focus has been to put into effect plans which ensure that, in each country and region, there emerges at least one cluster where the third milestone has been passed: a place where large numbers of people are working together and contributing to the life of a vibrant community. Conscious, however, that the goal for this twenty-five-year period is to establish

an intensive programme of growth in every cluster in the world, the believers have also set about opening new clusters to the Faith as well as intensifying their efforts in places with an existing programme of growth. There is a heightened awareness of the opportunity for pioneers to arise in all parts of the world—many devoted souls are considering how they might respond to this opportunity, and many others have already filled posts, noticeably on the home front but increasingly in the international field as well. This is one of several ways in which, as we had hoped, a spirit of mutual support is being expressed by the friends everywhere. Communities where strength has been built have committed themselves to supporting the progress being made in a different place—in another cluster, region, country, or even continent—and creative means have been found to offer encouragement from afar and enable experience to be shared directly. Meanwhile, the basic approach of capturing what is being learned in a cluster, so that it can inform plans made locally and elsewhere, is widely practised. We have been gratified to see that particular attention is being paid to learning how to enhance the quality of the educational experience offered by the institute. When the institute process takes root in a community, its effects are dramatic. Witness, for instance, those centres of intense activity where the inhabitants have come to regard the training institute as a powerful instrument that is theirs: an instrument for whose sound development they have assumed principal responsibility. Knowing well that the doors of the Faith always stand wide open, the believers are learning how to give encouragement to those who are poised to enter. To walk with such souls, and to help them cross the threshold, is a privilege and a special joy; in each cultural context, there is much to be learned about the dynamics of this resonant moment of recognition and belonging. And that is not all. While in many clusters efforts to contribute to social transformation are at their earliest stages, National Spiritual Assemblies, ably supported as ever by the Counsellors, are actively seeking to learn more about how these efforts emerge from the community-building process. Discussions about the social and material well-being of a people are being cultivated within groups of families and in communities, while the friends are also finding ways to participate in meaningful discourses that are unfolding in their immediate surroundings.

Amid all we have described, the actions of the youth shine resplendent. Far from being mere passive absorbers of influence—whether the influence be benign or otherwise—they have proven themselves bold and discerning protagonists of the Plan. Where a community has seen them in this light and created conditions for their progress, the youth have more than justified the confidence shown in them. They are teaching the Faith to their friends and making service the foundation of more meaningful friendships. Frequently, such service takes the form of educating those younger than themselves—offering them not only moral and spiritual education, but often assistance with their schooling too. Charged with a sacred responsibility to strengthen the institute process, Bahá'í youth are fulfilling our cherished hopes.

The setting for all these efforts is a deeply unsettled age. There is widespread acknowledgement that the present-day structures of society are ill-prepared to address the needs of humanity in its current travails. Much that was widely assumed to be certain and unshakeable is being questioned, and the resulting ferment is producing a longing for a unifying vision. The chorus of voices raised in support of oneness, equality, and justice shows how many share these aspirations for their societies. Of course, it is no surprise to a follower of the Blessed Beauty that hearts should long for the spiritual ideals which He propounded. But we nevertheless find it striking that, in a year when the prospects for humanity's collective progress have seldom seemed gloomier, the light of the Faith shone with astonishing brilliance in more than ten thousand conferences, attended by nearly one and a half million people, focused on the means of promoting those same ideals. Bahá'u'lláh's vision, and His exhortation to humankind to work in unity for the betterment of the world, was the centre round which diverse elements of society eagerly gathered—and no wonder, for as 'Abdu'l Bahá has explained, "Every community in the world findeth in these Divine Teachings the realization of its highest aspirations." Some well-wishers of humanity might first be drawn to the Bahá'í community as a place of refuge, a shelter from a world polarized and paralysed. Yet beyond a shelter, what they find are kindred souls labouring together to build the world anew.

Much could be written about the geographic spread of the conferences, the extraordinary impetus they imparted to the new Plan, or the heartfelt expressions of joy and enthusiasm they evoked from those who attended. But in these few lines we wish to draw attention to what they signified about the development of the Cause. They were a reflection of a Bahá'í community that sees kinship, not difference. This outlook made it natural to explore the Nine Year Plan at gatherings to which all were welcome. The friends considered the Plan's implications for their societies in the company of not only individuals and families, but local leaders and authority figures as well. Bringing together so many people in one place created the conditions for a transformative conversation about spiritual and social progress, one that is unfolding the world over. The special contribution that such gatherings—at once open, uplifting, and purposeful—can make to an expanding pattern of community development in a cluster is a valuable lesson for Bahá'í institutions to bear in mind for the future.

And so the company of the faithful enter the second year of the Plan with a fresh perspective and a profound insight into the significance of what they seek to achieve. How different actions look when viewed in light of the society-building power they release! This expansive prospect allows a sustained activity to be seen as much more than an isolated act of service or just a data point. In place after place, the initiatives being pursued reveal a population learning how to take increasing responsibility for navigating the path of its own development. The resulting spiritual and social transformation manifests itself in the life of a people in a variety of ways. In the previous series of Plans, it could be seen most clearly in the promotion of spiritual education and collective worship. In this new series of Plans, increasing attention needs to be given to other processes that seek to enhance the life of a community—for example, by improving public health, protecting the environment, or drawing more effectively on the power of the arts. What is required for all these complementary aspects of a community's well-being to advance is, of course, the capacity to engage in systematic learning in all these areas—a capacity that draws on insights arising from the Teachings and the accumulated store of human knowledge generated through scientific enquiry. As this capacity grows, much will be accomplished over the coming decades.

This expanded, society-building vision has far-reaching implications. Each community is on its own path towards its realization. But progress in one place often has features in common with progress in another. One feature is that, as capacity increases and a local or national community's powers multiply, then, in the fullness of time, the conditions required for the emergence of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, set out in our Riḍván 2012 message, will eventually be fulfilled. As we indicated in our message to you last Riḍván, we will periodically identify places where a Bahá'í Temple is to be raised up. We are delighted to call, at this time, for the establishment of local Houses of Worship in Kanchanpur, Nepal, and Mwinilunga, Zambia. Beyond this, we call for a national House of Worship to be raised up in Canada, in the vicinity of the long-established National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds in Toronto. These projects, and others to be initiated in the future, will benefit from the support provided to the Temples Fund by the friends in every land.

Copious are the blessings that a benevolent Lord has chosen to bestow upon His loved ones. Lofty is the calling, magnificent the prospect. Pressing are the times in which we have all been summoned to serve. Impassioned, then, are the prayers with which, on your behalf and for your tireless efforts, we supplicate at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]