

*Selected Messages of  
The Universal House of Justice*  
1963 - 1995



**SELECTED MESSAGES  
OF  
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE  
1963 - 1995**

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## **The Universal House of Justice**

30 April 1963

[To the First Bahá'í 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 wilt 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 lifework 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 Center, 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 fortitude hath shone forth and the truth hath been established that the authority to choose rests with God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Unconstrained, through whom the ocean of bounty hath surged and the fragrance of the gracious favors of God, the Lord of mankind, hath been diffused."

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.

## The Universal House of Justice

7 May 1963

To the annual National Conventions of the Bahá'í World

Beloved Friends,

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 Center 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 Center 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 lifework 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.

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 \$210,000.00, 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.

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 Center; 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 Ḥaẓíratu'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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



25 August 1963

To the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The whole Bahá'í World will be grief-stricken at the news of the sad fate which has overtaken the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád, the first Temple raised to the glory of Bahá'u'lláh. Due to its unsafe condition, resulting from earthquakes, the building has been entirely demolished and the site cleared.

The building of this edifice, the only structure of its kind to be raised and completed in the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was described by the beloved Guardian as "a lasting witness to the fervor and the self-sacrifice of the Oriental believers." This "enterprise," the Guardian further wrote, "must rank not only as the first major undertaking launched through the concerted efforts of His followers in the Heroic Age of His Faith, but as one of the most brilliant and enduring achievements in the history of the first Bahá'í century."

The Bahá'í center in 'Ishqábád was founded in the days of Bahá'u'lláh. Already during His lifetime preliminary steps had been adopted by the friends of that community to build, in accordance with the provisions of the Most Holy Book, a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

However, the project had to be postponed until 1902, at the end of the first decade of the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when He initiated its construction, called on the friends in the East to offer their contributions towards the fulfillment of this goal, and personally encouraged and directed its development at every stage. The Báb's cousin, the venerable Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih, offered his total wealth towards this meritorious enterprise, established his residence in that city, and personally supervised its construction.

The laying of the cornerstone of this edifice at a ceremony attended by the delegate of the Czar—the Governor-General of Turkistan—and the initial steps taken to raise this first House of Worship of the Bahá'í World, inspired the friends in America, who, in 1903, eager to demonstrate the quality of their faith, petitioned 'Abdu'l-Bahá for permission to erect the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the West.

In addition to the Temple itself, two schools, one for boys and one for girls, and a pilgrim house were built. The local community, and the activities of the friends throughout the provinces of Turkistan expanded and developed in stature until 1928, when the law expropriating religious edifices was applied to this Temple. However, under the terms of two five-year leases, the Bahá'í community was permitted to continue to use the building as a house of worship. In 1938 the Temple was completely expropriated and converted into an art gallery.

In 1948 violent earthquakes shook the whole town causing devastation and ruin. The building was seriously damaged. The only section which remained relatively secure was the central rotunda. Heavy yearly rains further weakened the structure to such a degree as to endanger the safety of houses in the vicinity. It was at this point that the authorities decided to demolish the remaining edifice and clear the site.

A reliable report, recently received, indicates that had the Temple been restored to us at this point, we should have had no option but to raze the building ourselves.

Please share this news with the friends but we do not wish National Assemblies, Local Assemblies or individual believers to take any action.

With loving greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

October 1963

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

Fellow believers in the Cause of God,

Six years ago when nearing the midway point of the Ten Year Crusade, the Bahá'í World found itself abruptly deprived of the guiding hand of its beloved Guardian. The anguish which then seized our hearts, far from paralyzing the progress of the Cause, stiffened our resolve and fired our zeal to complete the tasks which God, through His Chosen Branch, had laid upon us. The august institution of the Hands of the Cause of God which he had, but recently, in compliance with the instructions of the Master's Will, raised up, kept the people of this Cause faithfully to the path which had been shown to us by the pen of divine guidance, and brought us not only to the triumphal conclusion of that Crusade but to the culminating point of the construction of the framework of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.

In March 1930 Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had "in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as Their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world." After long and prayerful consultation, the House of Justice, as the friends have already been informed, found that there is no way in which it can legislate for a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi. The Universal House of Justice has therefore begun, in humble obedience to the Will of God, and strengthened by daily prayer in the Holy Shrines, to undertake the heavy tasks laid upon it. In the words of our beloved Guardian it "will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world" and "will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause."

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

As the significance of the Cause of God continues in the years ahead to become more clearly apparent to the eyes of men, a great responsibility to watch over its security rests upon all of its institutions. The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, charged in the sacred Texts with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith, has a particularly vital responsibility to discharge. In their capacity as protectors of the Faith, the Hands will continue to take action to expel Covenant-breakers and to reinstate those who sincerely repent, subject in each instance to the approval of The Universal House of Justice. Exercising their function of propagating the Faith, the Hands of the Cause will inspire, advise and assist the National Spiritual Assemblies in the work as they did in the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi, assisted by the members of their Auxiliary Boards who will continue to fulfill those functions outlined for them by him.

We stand now upon the threshold of the second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, with the outposts of the Cause established in the remotest corners of the earth, and having already witnessed the beginnings of that entry into the Faith by troops promised by the Master Himself. The foundation of the Kingdom has been securely laid, the framework has been raised. The friends must now consolidate these achievements, safeguard their institutions and gather the peoples and kindreds of the world into the Ark which the Hand of God has built.

Next Ridván will be launched the second of those world-encircling enterprises destined in the course of time to carry the Word of God to every human soul. The Standard-Bearers of this Nine Year Plan are the Hands of the Cause of God. The responsibility for directing the work will rest upon the shoulders of the National Spiritual Assemblies, the generals of the Army of Light, under the guidance of The Universal House of Justice.

As the first step inaugurating this great undertaking we rejoice to announce the formation next Ridván of nineteen National Spiritual Assemblies, resulting in the dissolution of six of the existing Regional National Spiritual Assemblies, and bringing the total number of these pillars of The Universal House of Justice to sixty-nine. The National and Regional National Assemblies now to be formed are:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North West Africa, with its seat in Tunis, comprising Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Spanish Sahara, Rio de Oro, Mauritania, the Canary Is., and Madeira.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of West Africa, with its seat in Monrovia, comprising Liberia, Sénégal, Gambia, Portuguese Guinea, Guinée, Sierra Leone, Mali, Upper Volta, Ivory Coast and Cape Verde Is.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of West Central Africa, with its seat in Victoria, comprising Cameroon, Spanish Guinea, St. Thomas I., Fernando Po I., Corisco I., Nigeria, Niger, Dahomey, Togo, and Ghana.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Uganda and Central Africa, with its seat in Kampala, comprising Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo (Ex-Belgian), the Congo Republic (Ex-French), Central African Republic, Gabon and Chad.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kenya, with its seat in Nairobi.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, with its seat in Dar-es-Salaam, comprising Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Mafia I., and Pemba I.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South Central Africa, with its seat in Salisbury, comprising Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Bechuanaland.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South and West Africa, with its seat in Johannesburg, comprising Angola, Southwest Africa, South Africa, Zululand, Swaziland, Basutoland, Mozambique and St. Helena.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Indian Ocean, with its seat in Port Louis, comprising Mauritius, the Malagasy Republic, Réunion I., Seychelles Is., Comoro Is., and the Chagos Archipelago.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Hawaiian Islands, with its seat in Honolulu.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the South Pacific Ocean, with its seat in Suva, comprising the Gilbert and Ellice Is., Nauru Is., Fiji, Samoa Is., Tonga Is., and Cook Is.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the South West Pacific Ocean, with its seat in Honiara, comprising the Solomon Is., New Hebrides Is., New Caledonia and Loyalty Is.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North East Asia, with its seat in Tokyo, comprising Japan, Formosa, Hong Kong and Macau.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Korea, with its seat in Seoul.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia, with its seat in Kuala Lumpur, comprising Malaya, Singapore, Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia, with its seat in Djakarta, comprising Indonesia, the Mentawai Is., Portuguese Timor and West Irian.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Vietnam, with its seat in Saigon, and having jurisdiction over the Bahá'ís of Cambodia.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Thailand, with its seat in Bangkok, and having jurisdiction over the Bahá'ís of Laos.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Philippines, with its seat in Manila.

The detailed goals of the Plan, which will include sixty-nine national plans, have yet to be announced, but they must be such as to develop still further the World Center of the Faith and the work of its institutions;

to consolidate those territories which have already been opened to the Faith; to bring God's healing Message to many more of the peoples and territories of the world including all the unopened territories of the Ten Year Crusade and all the remaining independent states of the planet; and to achieve worldwide proclamation of the Faith to mark the Centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's Proclamation to the kings and rulers in 1867-1868.

In the spring of 1968 the next election for The Universal House of Justice will take place.

Beloved friends, the Cause of God, guarded and nurtured since its inception by God's Messengers, by the Center of His Covenant and by His Sign on earth, now enters a new epoch, the third of the Formative Age. It must now grow rapidly in size, increase its spiritual cohesion and executive ability, develop its institutions and extend its influence into all strata of society. We, its members, must, by constant study of the life-giving Word, and by dedicated service, deepen in spiritual understanding and show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices and distractions of present day society. Relying upon God alone, we can promote His Cause and establish His Kingdom on earth. Only thus can we prove our love for Those Who brought this new day into being. Only thus can we prove the truth of Their Divine Mission and demonstrate how valid was Their Sacrifice.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



The Universal House of Justice

6 October 1963

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

We wish to share with you the text of the following resolution:

After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, The Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

Please share this message with the friends in your jurisdiction.

With loving greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

19 November 1963

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Friends,

The relationship of the Continental Hands and their respective National Assemblies was clearly delineated in the Message of the beloved Guardian dated June 4, 1957:

CALL UPON HANDS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EACH CONTINENT SEPARATELY ESTABLISH HENCEFORTH DIRECT CONTACT DELIBERATE WHENEVER FEASIBLE AS FREQUENTLY POSSIBLE EXCHANGE REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED THEIR RESPECTIVE AUXILIARY BOARDS NATIONAL COMMITTEES EXERCISE UNRELAXING VIGILANCE CARRY OUT UNFLINCHINGLY SACRED INESCAPABLE DUTIES. SECURITY PRECIOUS FAITH PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL HEALTH BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES VITALITY FAITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS PROPER FUNCTIONING ITS LABORIOUSLY ERECTED INSTITUTIONS FRUITION ITS WORLDWIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILLMENT ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY ALL DIRECTLY DEPENDENT BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITIES NOW RESTING MEMBERS THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS OCCUPYING WITH UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE NEXT INSTITUTION GUARDIANSHIP FOREMOST RANK DIVINELY ORDAINED ADMINISTRATIVE HIERARCHY WORLD ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

These highly significant words of the beloved Guardian clearly foreshadow the tremendous importance of the joint responsibility which he placed upon the Hands and the National Assemblies in protecting the believers and fostering the worldwide development of the Faith.

We stress the necessity of doing everything possible to expedite and facilitate this free play of consultation between the Hands and the National Assemblies within the spirit and framework of these instructions of Shoghi Effendi. The two institutions have joint and complementary functions which can be discharged successfully only if the greatest degree of understanding and cooperation exists between them.

We are confident that this relationship will be further strengthened and developed in the manner envisioned by the Guardian, and that it will contribute in large measure to the successful achievement of the goals of the Nine Year Plan which is to be inaugurated this coming Riqdán.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

25 November 1963

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

The Hands of the Cause at their London Conclave last May decided that Auxiliary Board members should be free of administrative responsibilities in order to devote their full energies to their work as Board members. Those Board members serving on National Assemblies were therefore requested to decide, before Ridván 1964, in which capacity they could best serve the Cause.

In view of this request made by the Hands of the Cause to their Auxiliary Board members, The Universal House of Justice has reached the following decisions:

National Assemblies in whose areas of jurisdiction Board members reside, should point out to the delegates at Convention that whilst teaching and administrative duties are not mutually exclusive, it is desirable that Auxiliary Board members, whether for teaching or protection, be left free to concentrate on the work allotted to them by the Hands of the Cause in each Continent. The following extract from the Guardian's letter, written through his secretary, could be shared with the delegates for their guidance when casting their votes:

"The teachers of the Cause can surely become members of any Assembly or committee. There should be no incapacity attached to them. But Shoghi Effendi would just prefer to see them devote all their time to teaching and leave the administrative functions for those who cannot serve as teachers."  
(*Bahá'í News*, October 1932).

Should Board members still be elected on National Assemblies after the above explanation, it should rest with each Board member to decide which of the two functions he feels best suited to perform. The Universal House of Justice, therefore, approves the request made by the Hands of the Cause to their Board members that they choose between the two functions.

In the event of the resignation of Auxiliary Board members from National Assemblies, this should be considered as good reason for resignation. If, however, the National Assembly, in view of special conditions, should consider such resignations to be detrimental to the interests of the Faith of that National Community, and the Board member should insist upon resigning on the grounds of his membership on the Board, the matter should be at once referred to The Universal House of Justice by the National Spiritual Assembly for examination and final decision. Pending such a decision, the Board member should continue his membership on the National Assembly, and explain his position to the Hands of the Cause in his continent.

Measures will have to be taken by National Assemblies according to normal procedure to fill any vacancies created in this way. If the vacancy is recognized while Convention is still in session, a by-election could be arranged before Convention disbands.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

18 December 1963

To the Bahá'ís of East and West

Dear Friends,

With the rapid approach of the launching of the Nine Year Plan, The Universal House of Justice feels that it is timely to lay clearly before the Bahá'ís of all countries, the needs of the Fund at all its levels: local, national, continental and international.

The continual expansion of the Faith and the diversification of the activities of Bahá'í communities make it more and more necessary for every believer to ponder carefully his responsibilities and contribute as much and as regularly as he or she can. Contributing to the Fund is a service that every believer can render, be he poor or wealthy; for this is a spiritual responsibility in which the amount given is not important. It is the degree of the sacrifice of the giver, the love with which he makes his gift, and the unity of all the friends in this service which bring spiritual confirmations. As the beloved Guardian wrote in August 1957: "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 Center of His Covenant, will exert."

Not only the individual's responsibility to contribute is important at this time, but also the uses to which the fund is put and the areas in which it is expended.

Much of the present rapid expansion of the Faith is taking place in areas of great poverty where the believers, however much they sacrifice, cannot produce sufficient funds to sustain the work. It is these very areas which are the most fruitful in teaching, and a sum of money spent here will produce ten times—even a hundred times—the results obtainable in other parts of the world. Yet in the past months The Universal House of Justice has had to refuse a number of appeals for assistance from such areas because there just was not enough money in the International Fund.

It should therefore be the aim of every local and national community to become not only self-supporting, but to expend its funds with such wisdom and economy as to be able to contribute substantially to the Bahá'í International Fund, thus enabling the House of Justice to aid the work in fruitful but impoverished areas, to assist new National Assemblies to start their work, to contribute to major international undertakings of the Nine Year Plan such as Oceanic Conferences, and to carry forward the work of beautifying the land surrounding the Holy Shrines at the World Center of the Faith.

Nor should the believers, individually or in their Assemblies, forget the vitally important Continental Funds which provide for the work of the Hands of the Cause of God and their Auxiliary Boards. This divine institution, so assiduously fostered by the Guardian, and which has already played a unique role in the history of the Faith, is destined to render increasingly important services in the years to come.

In the midst of a civilization torn by strifes and enfeebled by materialism, the people of Bahá are building a new world. We face at this time opportunities and responsibilities of vast magnitude and great urgency. Let each believer in his inmost heart resolve not to be seduced by the ephemeral allurements of the society around him, nor to be drawn into its feuds and short-lived enthusiasms, but instead to transfer all he can from the old world to that new one which is the vision of his longing and will be the fruit of his labors.

With loving greetings,

[signed: 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 Center 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 Intercontinental Conferences; the coordination of worldwide plans to commemorate, in 1967/68, the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's Proclamation to the kings and rulers which centered 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-Adhikárs, one in Asia and one in Latin America; the acquisition of thirty-two Teaching Institutes, fifty-two national Ḥaẓíratu'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 splendor 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 cooperation 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 centers 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 labor 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

July 1964

To the beloved of God gathered in the European Teaching Conference called on the occasion of the dedication of the Mother Temple of Europe

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have just witnessed the dedication of the Mother Temple of Europe—a project of untold significance and tremendous potential for the spread of the light of God's Faith in that Continent. One of the major achievements called for by our beloved Guardian at the outset of the Ten Year Crusade, this Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was triumphantly raised during its closing years as the fruit of long and arduous labors in the face of determined opposition and upon the sacrificial gifts of believers from all parts of the world. Now dedicated in the opening months of the Nine Year Plan, it forms a striking link between these two great crusades, demonstrating afresh the organic progress of the Cause whereby the efforts exerted in one period bear fruit in the next, which in turn endow the Bahá'í Community with new and greater capacities for the winning of still greater victories.

You are now gathered in this Conference to deliberate on ways and means of accomplishing the goals which are set before you. Let every believer, as he considers in detail these various goals, bear in mind four supreme objectives: to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to every stratum of society, not only in the towns and cities but also in the villages and country districts where the virus of materialism has had much less effect on the lives of men; to take urgent, wise and well-considered steps to spread the Faith to those countries of Eastern Europe in which it has not yet become established; to reinforce strongly the heroic band of pioneers in the islands of the Mediterranean and the North Sea—islands which are to play such an important role in the awakening of the entire continent—as well as to prosecute energetically the goals you are called upon to achieve in other continents and oceans; and to foster the cooperation between National Communities and between National Spiritual Assemblies and the Hands of the Cause of God which has contributed so markedly to the work of the Faith on that Continent and is so essential for its future development.

Above all let every European Bahá'í have ever-present in his mind that these are the five years during which Bahá'u'lláh sojourned on the soil of that Continent a century ago. Let him resolve so to deepen his knowledge of the Faith and so to increase his standards of self-sacrifice and dedication to the Cause as to play his part in building a Community which will be worthy of this supreme bounty and which will be a beacon light to the peoples of this fear-wracked world.

In 1953 Shoghi Effendi wrote that the Continent of Europe had “at last at this critical hour—this great turning point in its fortunes—entered upon what may well be regarded as the opening phase of a great

spiritual revival that bids fair to eclipse any period in its spiritual history.” Those who have been privileged to witness the extraordinary strengthening and consolidation of the Cause in Europe during the course of the last eleven years are well aware of the reservoir of spiritual potential that has been building up and the transformation of the life of the European Bahá’í Community that has ensued. May the completion and dedication of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár be the signal for the unleashing of this potential, bringing about on the European mainland and in the islands around its shores a quickening of the process of individual conversion comparable to those events which have transpired with such astonishing suddenness in other continents of the globe.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

13 July 1964

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

### **TEACHING THE MASSES**

When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and of Islam. These masses are the rank and file, steeped in traditions of their own, but receptive to the new Word of God, by which, when they truly respond to it, they become so influenced as to transform those who come in contact with them.

God's standards are different from those of men. According to men's standards, the acceptance of any cause by people of distinction, of recognized fame and status, determines the value and greatness of that cause. But, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "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." Or again, "He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men, if ye be of them that ponder His Cause in their hearts." In countries where teaching the masses has succeeded, the Bahá'ís have poured out their time and effort in village areas to the same extent as they had formerly done in cities and towns. The results indicate how unwise it is to solely concentrate on one section of the population. Each National Assembly therefore should so balance its resources and harmonize its efforts that the Faith of God is taught not only to those who are readily accessible but to all sections of society, however remote they may be.

The unsophisticated people of the world—and they form the large majority of its population—have the same right to know of the Cause of God as others. When the friends are teaching the Word of God they should be careful to give the Message in the same simplicity as it is enunciated in our Teachings. In their contacts they must show genuine and divine love. The heart of an unlettered soul is extremely sensitive; any trace of prejudice on the part of the pioneer or teacher is immediately sensed.

When teaching among the masses, the friends should be careful not to emphasize the charitable and humanitarian aspects of the Faith as a means to win recruits. Experience has shown that when facilities such as schools, dispensaries, hospitals, or even clothes and food are offered to the people being taught, many complications arise. The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with

the beauty of the Teachings; and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

After declaration, the new believers must not be left to their own devices. Through correspondence and dispatch of visitors, through conferences and training courses, these friends must be patiently strengthened and lovingly helped to develop into full Bahá'í maturity. The beloved Guardian referring to the duties of Bahá'í Assemblies in assisting the newly declared believer has written: "... the members of each and every Assembly should endeavor, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer into Bahá'í maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the teachings."

Expansion and consolidation are twin processes that must go hand in hand. The friends must not stop expansion in the name of consolidation. Deepening the newly enrolled believers generates tremendous stimulus which results in further expansion. The enrollment of new believers, on the other hand, creates a new spirit in the community and provides additional potential manpower that will reinforce the consolidation work.

We would like to share with you some of the methods used by National Assemblies in various continents that have proved useful in teaching the masses, and attach a list. Certain of these may be valuable in your area, in addition to any methods you may yourself devise.

We are fervently praying that all National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, supported by the individual believers, will achieve outstanding success in the fulfillment of this glorious objective.

Please share this communication with all the friends.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## Teaching the Masses

### Annex

1. Materials are sent at once to the new believers. In some places this material is in the form of printed cards, mainly in color, portraying a Bahá'í theme or principle. This helps the new believer to know that his declaration has been accepted and to feel that he now belongs to the new Faith.
2. Training courses of about 2 weeks duration are held. To facilitate attendance and reduce cost, a number of villages are grouped together as one zone in which the course is held. The students to the courses are usually selected, so that the more capable participate, and teaching is facilitated.

Transportation expenses, feeding and accommodation are provided, if it is found that the participants are unable to cover such expenses themselves. The material to be taught is prepared ahead of time, presented in simple language, and translated into the vernacular. After the course, the more promising students are picked out, and with their consent, are requested to undertake teaching projects for a limited period. It is sometimes found that long-term projects are also useful. These projects generally are carefully planned as to their duration, places to be visited, and material to be taught. If the traveling teachers are not able to cover their expenses, traveling and living expenses are provided by the Fund for the execution of a given and temporary teaching project.

3. Shorter training courses in the form of conferences over a long weekend are held.

4. These activities—training courses and conferences—are repeated as frequently as possible and are not dependent upon the acquisition of Teaching Institutes. In the absence of such Institutes, these courses and conferences are normally held in Bahá'í homes or hired quarters, such as schools, etc. In order to facilitate the physical catering and accommodation of the participants they are sometimes asked to come to the course with their eating utensils and bedding.

5. In the visits made to the villages, the visiting teacher meets with the Local Communities to give them basic Bahá'í knowledge, such as living the Bahá'í life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting, Nineteen Day Feasts, Bahá'í elections, and contributions to the Fund. The question of contributions to the Fund is of utmost importance, so that the new believers may quickly feel themselves to be responsible members of the Community. Each National Assembly must find ways and means to stimulate the offering of contributions, in cash or kind, to make it easy for the friends to contribute and to give proper receipts to the donors.

These are but suggestions based on experience which may help you in your efforts to teach and deepen the spiritually starved multitudes in your area.

In the course of carrying out such a tremendous spiritual campaign among the masses, disappointments will well be encountered. We tabulate a few instances that have been brought to our notice:

1. Visiting pioneers or teachers may find in some places newly enrolled believers not so enthusiastic about their religion as expected, or not adjusting to standards of Bahá'í life, or they may find them thinking of material benefits they may hope to derive from their new membership. We should always remember that the process of nursing the believer into full spiritual maturity is slow, and needs loving education and patience.



2. Some teaching committees, in their eagerness to obtain results, place undue emphasis on obtaining a great number of declarations to the detriment of the quality of teaching.
3. Some traveling teachers, in their desire to show the result of their services, may not scrupulously teach their contacts, and in some rare cases, if, God forbid, they are insincere, may even give false reports.

Such irregularities have happened and can be repeated, but must not be a source of discouragement. By sending a team of teachers to an area, or by sending at intervals other teachers to those areas, and through correspondence and reports, such situations can be detected and immediately adjusted. The administration of the Faith must at all times keep in close touch with the teaching work.

To sum up:

1. Teaching the waiting masses is a reality facing each National Assembly.
2. The friends must teach with conviction, determination, genuine love, lack of prejudice, and in a simple language addressed to the heart.
3. Teaching must be followed up by training courses, conferences, and regular visits to deepen the believers in their knowledge of the Teachings.
4. The close touch of the National Office or Teaching Committees with the work is most essential, so that through reports and correspondence not only is information obtained and verified, but stimulation and encouragement is given.
5. Expansion and consolidation go hand in hand.
- 6.

## 1. The Universal House of Justice

September 1964

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

In our message to you of April, 1964, announcing the Nine Year Plan, we called attention to two major themes of that Plan, namely “a huge expansion of the Cause of God and universal participation by all believers in the life of that Cause.”

The enthusiastic vigor with which the believers throughout the world, under the devoted guidance of their National Spiritual Assemblies, have arisen to meet the challenge of the Plan, augurs well for the huge expansion called for. We now ask you to bend your efforts and thoughts, with equal enthusiasm, to the requirements of universal participation.

In that same message we indicated the meaning of universal participation: “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 splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.’”

“Regard the world as the human body,” wrote Bahá'u'lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá'í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties,” and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá'í World Community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause? The Bahá'í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance and the overflowing bounties of Bahá'u'lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained order.

In addition to teaching every believer can pray. Every believer can strive to make his "own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh." Every believer can contribute to the Fund. Not all believers can give public talks, not all are called upon to serve on administrative institutions. But all can pray, fight their own spiritual battles, and contribute to the Fund. If every believer will carry out these sacred duties, we shall be astonished at the accession of power which will result to the whole body, and which in its turn will give rise to further growth and the showering of greater blessings on all of us.

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master's oft expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

Our prayers for the happiness and success of the friends everywhere are constantly offered at the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

November 1964

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Beloved Friends,

Once again the World Center of our Faith has been the scene of historic events, affecting profoundly the immediate prosecution of the Nine Year Plan and the future development of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The occasion was the gathering in the Holy Land, for a period of fourteen days, of the Hands of the Cause of God to discuss their vital responsibilities, and particularly as Standard-Bearers of the Nine Year Plan.

The Universal House of Justice took advantage of this opportunity not only to receive the advice, opinions and views of the Hands on the progress of the Nine Year Plan but to consult them on the highly important goal announced at Ridván 1964 under World Center Goals as "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."

It was apparent that the elucidation of this vital goal, affecting as it does the relationship of the Hands of the Cause of God to all other institutions of the Cause, was imperative to the prosecution of the all-important teaching work and the development of the Bahá'í World Order.

Accordingly, The Universal House of Justice gave its full attention to this matter and, after study of the sacred texts and hearing the views of the Hands of the Cause themselves, has arrived at the following decisions:

There is no way to appoint, or to legislate to make it possible to appoint, Hands of the Cause of God.

Responsibility for decisions on matters of general policy affecting the Institution of the Hands of the Cause, which was formerly exercised by the beloved Guardian, now devolves upon The Universal House of Justice as the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn.

It is with great joy that we are able to share with you the initial steps now taken to attain the goal.

The assignment of the Hands to various continents remains unchanged but, in order to expedite the work, the continents of Asia and the Western Hemisphere will each be divided into zones for the day-to-day work of the Hands, one or more Hands being responsible for each zone. Asia will consist of two zones: the Middle East comprising the countries from and including Pakistan westwards and also Asiatic U.S.S.R.; and South and East Asia comprising the remainder of the continent. The Western Hemisphere will consist of three zones: North America, Central America (including Mexico) and the Antilles, and South America. The

Hawaiian Islands will be in the Australasian continental area, as listed in the recently issued statistical summary.

The number of members of the Auxiliary Boards for the propagation of the Faith will be increased in every continent, raising the total number of Auxiliary Board members in Africa from eighteen to twenty-seven; in Asia from fourteen to thirty-six; in Australasia from four to nine; in Europe from eighteen to twenty-seven; and in the Western Hemisphere from eighteen to thirty-six.

The Hands of the Cause in each continent are called upon to appoint one or more members of their Auxiliary Boards to act in an executive capacity on behalf of and in the name of each Hand, thereby assisting him in carrying out his work.

The exalted rank and specific functions of the Hands of the Cause of God make it inappropriate for them to be elected or appointed to administrative institutions, or to be elected as delegates to national conventions. Furthermore, it is their desire and the desire of the House of Justice that they be free to devote their entire energies to the vitally important duties conferred upon them in the Holy Writings. The importance of close collaboration between the Hands of the Cause and National Spiritual Assemblies cannot be overstressed, and a separate communication is being addressed to National Assemblies on this subject, supplementing guidance given in earlier letters.

We anticipate announcing at Ridván 1965 plans for Oceanic and Intercontinental Conferences, an overall plan for worldwide proclamation of the Faith during 1967–68, the centenary year of the revelation of the Súriy-i-Mulúk, involving cooperation of National and Local Assemblies throughout the world, and conditions of entry for a competition for the design of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Panama.

Teaching the masses is the greatest challenge now facing the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. No work is more important than that of carrying His Message with utmost speed to the bewildered and thirsting peoples of a spiritually parched world. Now, as the Hands return to their various continents, reinforced by a wider and more efficient organization of their work, we are confident that the whole Bahá'í world will, with rising enthusiasm and ever-increasing success, press forward with the teaching work, greatly increase the flow of pioneers, more widely participate in the financial support of the work of the Cause and add rapidly to the list of goals already accomplished.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

November 1964

To National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The gathering in the Holy Land of the Hands of the Cause of God has been an occasion of vital significance to the Faith. Please share the enclosed general message, as soon as possible, with all believers under your jurisdiction.

We now wish to elaborate the recent decisions as they affect the relationship between the Institution of the Hands of the Cause and yourselves, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world.

It is of the utmost importance that the Hands of the Cause and National Spiritual Assemblies be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in the areas for which they are responsible. We ask you therefore to work out with the Hands in your continent more efficient and easier methods of communication. The sharing of National Assembly minutes with the Hands of the Cause is entirely a matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to decide, but it is vitally important for you to regularly provide the Hands of the Cause with all information which is necessary to their work, including copies of pertinent committee reports.

The Hands of the Cause are preparing a schedule of proposed meetings with National Assemblies and will also be inviting members of National Assemblies to meet them in conferences with their Board members from time to time, a form of consultation which has been found most effective wherever it has been practiced.

Members of Auxiliary Boards should be freed from administrative responsibilities including serving on Committees and as delegates to conventions. In the event of any member of a National Assembly accepting appointment to a Board, the National Assembly should accept this as valid reason for that member's resignation from the Assembly; should a Board member be elected to a National Assembly, he must choose on which body he will serve.

We ask each National Assembly to extend a warm and cordial invitation to the Hands of its continent to attend its national convention. All Hands of the Cause present should be given the freedom of the convention. If no continental Hands can attend a convention they may appoint one or two Board members to act as special deputies for that convention, who will, of course, be warmly welcomed and given the courtesy of taking part in convention as deputies of the Hands.

The increase in the numbers of Board members will inevitably be reflected in an increase in the needs of the Continental Funds. This is a matter for discussion with the Hands in your continent, and we feel sure

that you will do your utmost to meet the new requirements, bearing in mind the importance which the beloved Guardian attached to direct contributions to these Funds by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, as well as by individual believers.

The fostering of this important relationship between the exalted body of the Hands of the Cause and the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world will inevitably strengthen the foundation and functioning of the Cause of God and enable its embryonic world order to grow as a healthy tree under whose shade all mankind will eventually find security and peace.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

9 March 1965

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Netherlands

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are glad that you have brought to our attention the questions perplexing some of the believers. It is much better for these questions to be put freely and openly than to have them, unexpressed, burdening the hearts of devoted believers. Once one grasps certain basic principles of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh such uncertainties are easily dispelled. This is not to say that the Cause of God contains no mysteries. Mysteries there are indeed, but they are not of a kind to shake one's faith once the essential tenets of the Cause and the indisputable facts of any situation are clearly understood.

The questions put by the various believers fall into three groups. The first group centers upon the following queries: Why were steps taken to elect a Universal House of Justice with the foreknowledge that there would be no Guardian? Was the time ripe for such an action? Could not the International Bahá'í Council have carried on the work?

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to The Universal House of Justice. The friends should clearly understand that before the election of The Universal House of Justice there was no knowledge that there would be no Guardian. There could not have been any such foreknowledge, whatever opinions individual believers may have held. Neither the Hands of the Cause of God, nor the International Bahá'í Council, nor any other existing body could make a decision upon this all-important matter. Only the House of Justice had authority to pronounce upon it. This was one urgent reason for calling the election of The Universal House of Justice as soon as possible.

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi the international administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the body of the believers. This was in accordance with the Guardian's designation of the Hands as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth."

From the very outset of their custodianship of the Cause of God the Hands realized that since they had no certainty of divine guidance such as is incontrovertibly assured to the Guardian and to The Universal House of Justice, their one safe course was to follow with undeviating firmness the instructions and policies of Shoghi Effendi. The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline,



such absolute loyalty and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.

The Guardian had given the Bahá'í world explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Ridván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential. This was the second pressing reason for the calling of the election of The Universal House of Justice. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Ten Year Crusade's being followed by other plans under the direction of The Universal House of Justice. One such reference is the following passage from a letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles on 25th February 1951, concerning its Two Year Plan which immediately preceded the Ten Year Crusade:

On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í world—undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of worldwide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by The Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.

Having been in charge of the Cause of God for six years, the Hands, with absolute faith in the Holy Writings, called upon the believers to elect The Universal House of Justice, and even went so far as to ask that they themselves be not voted for. The sole, sad instance of anyone succumbing to the allurements of power was the pitiful attempt of Charles Mason Remey to usurp the Guardianship.

The following excerpts from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá state clearly and emphatically the principles with which the friends are already familiar from the Will and Testament of the Master and the various letters of Shoghi Effendi, and explain the basis for the election of The Universal House of Justice. This Tablet was sent to Persia by the beloved Guardian himself, in the early years of his ministry, for circulation among the believers.

...for 'Abdu'l-Bahá is in a tempest of dangers and infinitely abhors differences of opinion Praise be to God, there are no grounds for differences.

The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendor of Whose light shineth through all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abhá Luminary. The Blessed Beauty is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of Their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at Their door.

My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples

shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of The Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference ... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.

The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favorable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

(*Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. III, pp. 500–501)

The friends should realize that there is nothing in the Texts to indicate that the election of The Universal House of Justice could be called only by the Guardian. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisaged the calling of its election in His own lifetime. At a time described by the Guardian as "the darkest moments of His [the Master's] life, under 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd's regime, when He stood ready to be deported to the most inhospitable regions of Northern Africa," and when even His life was threatened, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Ḥájí Mírzá Táqí Afnán, the cousin of the Báb and chief builder of the 'Ishqábád Temple, commanding him to arrange for the election of The Universal House of Justice should the threats against the Master materialize. The second part of the Master's Will is also relevant to such a situation and should be studied by the friends.

The second series of problems vexing some of the friends centers on the question of the infallibility of The Universal House of Justice and its ability to function without the presence of the Guardian. Particular difficulty has been experienced in understanding the implications of the following statement by the beloved Guardian:

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. "In all the Divine Dispensations," He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, "the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." Without such an institution the integrity of the

Faith would be imperiled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

(“The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 148)

Let the friends who wish for a clearer understanding of this passage at the present time consider it in the light of the many other texts which deal with the same subject, for example the following passages gleaned from the letters of Shoghi Effendi:

They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 20)

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to The Universal House of Justice by Bahá’u’lláh in the “Kitábu’l-Aqdas,” and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labors, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains....

(Letter dated 27 February 1929, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 8)

From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that The Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

(“The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 149–50)

Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies.

(“The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 148)

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members ...

(“The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 150)

Above all, let the hearts of the friends be assured by these words of Bahá’u’lláh:

The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men’s fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

(*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 109)

and these of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause! He doeth with His will that which pleaseth Him and He is powerful over all things! ...

(*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. III, p. 598)

It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter The Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the Writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself.

There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to “deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.” The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon The Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, “has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá’í writings.” Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding

“authoritative” or “inspired” interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of The Universal House of Justice.

“Such,” in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.”

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 23)

Every true believer, if he is to deepen in his understanding of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, must needs combine profound faith in the unfailing efficacy of His Message and His Covenant, with the humility of recognizing that no one of this generation can claim to have embraced the vastness of His Cause nor to have comprehended the manifold mysteries and potentialities it contains. The words of Shoghi Effendi bear ample testimony to this fact:

How vast is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh! How great the magnitude of His blessings showered upon humanity in this day! And yet, how poor, how inadequate our conception of their significance and glory! This generation stands too close to so colossal a Revelation to appreciate, in their full measure, the infinite possibilities of His Faith, the unprecedented character of His Cause, and the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 24)

We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it [Bahá'u'lláh's new world order] unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications....

(Letter dated 23 February 1924, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 62)

As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every center, because on these fortified and unshakable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly established in the days to come. When this most great Edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.

(Letter dated 19 December 1923—translated from the Persian)

Statements such as these indicate that the full meaning of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as an understanding of the implications of the World Order ushered in by that remarkable document can be

revealed only gradually to men's eyes, and after The Universal House of Justice has come into being. The friends are called upon to trust to time and to await the guidance of The Universal House of Justice, which, as circumstances require, will make pronouncements that will resolve and clarify obscure matters.

The third group of queries raised by the friends concerns details of functioning of The Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, particularly the matter of expulsion of members of the House of Justice. Such questions will be clarified in the Constitution of the House of Justice, the formulation of which is a goal of the Nine Year Plan. Meanwhile the friends are informed that any member committing a "sin injurious to the common weal," may be expelled from membership of the House of Justice by a majority vote of the House itself. Should any member, God forbid, be guilty of breaking the Covenant, the matter would be investigated by the Hands of the Cause of God, and the Covenant-breaker would be expelled by decision of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the House of Justice, as in the case of any other believer. The decision of the Hands in such a case would be announced to the Bahá'í world by The Universal House of Justice.

We are certain that when you share this letter with the friends and they have these quotations from the Scriptures and the Writings of the Guardian drawn to their attention, their doubts and misgivings will be dispelled and they will be able to devote their every effort to spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, serenely confident in the power of His Covenant to overcome whatever tests an inscrutable Providence may shower upon it, thus demonstrating its ability to redeem a travailing world and to upraise the Standard of the Kingdom of God on earth.

With loving greetings,

[signed: 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 centers 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 Center 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 honors and services, have arisen with renewed and matchless vigor 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 reopened: 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 Ḥaẓratu'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, Cariña 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 Ḥaẓratu'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 cooperation, 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, resettle the eighteen unoccupied ones, reinforce 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 intercontinentally, 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 Center 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, "Center 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 Ḥaẓratu'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 program 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 Islám; the royal Trustee of the Kingdom of the Hidden Imám; the monarchs of Christendom, its patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks; the recognized leaders of both the Sunnî and Shí'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 Intercontinental Conferences will be simultaneously held during the month of October in Panama City, Wilmette, Sydney, Kampala, Frankfurt, and New Delhi. The host and convener 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 Center.

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 splendors of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the Kingdom of God on earth.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

28 January 1966

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

From time to time questions have arisen about the application of the law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas on the observance of Bahá'í Holy Days. As you know, the recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days in at least ninety-five countries of the world is an important and highly significant objective of the Nine Year Plan, and is directly linked with the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh by the civil authorities as an independent religion enjoying its own rights and privileges.

The attainment of this objective will be facilitated and enhanced if the friends, motivated by their own realization of the importance of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, are obedient to them. For the guidance of believers we repeat the instructions of the beloved Guardian:

He wishes also to stress the fact that, according to our Bahá'í laws, work is forbidden on our nine Holy Days. Believers who have independent businesses or shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government, or other employers, refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment, but they should make every effort to have the independent status of their Faith recognized and their right to hold their own religious Holy Days acknowledged.

(From letter written on behalf of the Guardian  
to the American National Spiritual Assembly,  
dated 7 July 1947—*Bahá'í News*, No. 198, page 3)

This distinction between institutions that are under full or partial Bahá'í control is of a fundamental importance. Institutions that are entirely managed by Bahá'ís are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatever, that they should act otherwise ... The point which should be always remembered is that the issue in question is essentially a matter of conscience, and as such is of a binding effect upon all believers....

(From letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the American National Spiritual Assembly, dated 2 October 1935—*Bahá'í News*, No. 97, page 9)

In addition, steps should be taken to have Bahá'í children excused, on religious grounds, from attending school on Bahá'í Holy Days wherever possible. The Guardian has said:

Regarding children: at fifteen a Bahá'í is of age as far as keeping the laws of the Aqdas is concerned—prayer, fasting, etc. But children under fifteen should certainly observe the Bahá'í Holy Days, and not go to school, if this can be arranged, on these nine days.

(From letter written on behalf of  
the Guardian to the American National Spiritual Assembly,  
dated 25 October 1947)

National Assemblies should give this subject their careful consideration, and should provide ways and means for bringing this matter to the attention of the believers under their jurisdiction so that, as a matter of conscience, the mass of believers will uphold these laws and observe them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 February 1966

To all National Spiritual Assemblies Engaged in Mass Teaching Work

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Since writing to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world regarding the importance of teaching the masses, we have received reports from all over the world indicating the steady increase in the number of believers, the concentration of the friends on the more receptive areas, however remote these may have been, and the opening up of new and challenging fields for expansion and service. In this letter we wish once again to stress the importance of this subject, share with you our thoughts regarding the supreme need to preserve the victories you have already won and the necessity to pursue the vital work in which you are engaged and to which the eyes of your sister communities in East and West are turned with admiration.

It has been due to the splendid victories in large-scale conversion that the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has entered a new phase in its development and establishment throughout the world. It is imperative, therefore, that the process of teaching the masses be not only maintained but accelerated. The teaching committee structure that each National Assembly may adopt to ensure best results in the extension of its teaching work is a matter left entirely to its discretion, but an efficient teaching structure there must be, so that the tasks are carried out with dispatch and in accordance with the administrative principles of our Faith. From among the believers native to each country, competent traveling teachers must be selected and teaching projects worked out. In the words of our beloved Guardian, commenting upon the teaching work in Latin America: "Strong and sustained support should be given to the vitally needed and highly meritorious activities started by the native ... traveling teachers, ... who, as the mighty task progresses, must increasingly bear the brunt of responsibility for the propagation of the Faith in their homelands."

While this vital teaching work is progressing each National Assembly must ever bear in mind that expansion and consolidation are inseparable processes that must go hand in hand. The interdependence of these processes is best elucidated in the following passage from the writings of the beloved Guardian: "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. That this community ... may maintain a proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development ... is the ardent hope of my heart." To ensure that the spiritual life of the individual believer is continuously enriched, that local communities are becoming increasingly conscious of their collective duties, and that the institutions of an evolving

administration are operating efficiently, is, therefore, as important as expanding into new fields and bringing in the multitudes under the shadow of the Cause.

These objectives can only be attained when each National Spiritual Assembly makes proper arrangements for all the friends to be deepened in the knowledge of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assemblies in consultation with the Hands of the Cause, who are the Standard-Bearers of the Nine Year Plan, should avail themselves of the assistance of Auxiliary Board members, who, together with the traveling teachers selected by the Assembly or its Teaching Committees, should be continuously encouraged to conduct deepening courses at Teaching Institutes and to make regular visits to Local Spiritual Assemblies. The visitors, whether Board members or traveling teachers should meet on such occasions not only with the Local Assembly but, of course, with the local community members, collectively at general meetings and even, if necessary, individually in their homes.

The subjects to be discussed at such meetings with the Local Assembly and the friends should include among others the following points:

1. the extent of the spread and stature of the Faith today;
2. the importance of the daily obligatory prayers (at least the short prayer);
3. the need to educate Bahá'í children in the Teachings of the Faith and encourage them to memorize some of the prayers;
4. the stimulation of youth to participate in community life by giving talks, etc. and having their own activities, if possible;
5. the necessity to abide by the laws of marriage, namely, the need to have a Bahá'í ceremony, to obtain the consent of parents, to observe monogamy; faithfulness after marriage; likewise the importance of abstinence from all intoxicating drinks and drugs;
6. the local Fund and the need for the friends to understand that the voluntary act of contributing to the Fund is both a privilege and a spiritual obligation. There should also be discussion of various methods that could be followed by the friends to facilitate their contributions and the ways open to the Local Assembly to utilize its local Fund to serve the interests of its community and the Cause;
7. the importance of the Nineteen Day Feast and the fact that it should be a joyful occasion and rallying point of the entire community;



8. the manner of election with as many workshops as required, including teaching of simple methods of balloting for illiterates, such as having one central home as the place for balloting and arranging for one literate person, if only a child, to be present at that home during the whole day, if necessary;
9. last but not least, the all-important teaching work, both in the locality and its neighboring centers, as well as the need to continuously deepen the friends in the essentials of the Faith. The friends should be made to realize that in teaching the Faith to others they should not only aim at assisting the seeking soul to join the Faith, but also at making him a teacher of the Faith and its active supporter.

All the above points should, of course, be stressed within the framework of the importance of the Local Spiritual Assembly, which should be encouraged to vigorously direct its attention to these vital functions and become the very heart of the community life of its own locality, even if its meetings should become burdened with the problems of the community. The local friends should understand the importance of the law of consultation and realize that it is to the Local Spiritual Assembly that they should turn, abide by its decisions, support its projects, cooperate wholeheartedly with it in its task to promote the interests of the Cause, and seek its advice and guidance in the solution of personal problems and the adjudication of disputes, should any arise amongst the members of the community.

As The Universal House of Justice intends to have on file a full record of the progress of the teaching work in large-scale conversion areas, we request you to send us any published material, such as forms, cards, pamphlets, pictures, audiovisual aids, deepening booklets, etc. that you are currently using, with adequate explanations by your Assembly as to how they are being used, and any comments you may wish to make about their usefulness. Your National Assembly should also feel free to share with us your problems and needs as well as any recommendations you may have. We are looking forward to receiving a prompt reply to this letter, as we feel that an early evaluation of the methods used in various fields of teaching is vital and essential at this time.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: 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 favorable 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 resettled territories are: Corisco Island and Spanish Guinea in Africa and Maldivé Islands and Nicobar Islands in Asia.

As announced last Riḍván, the first Convention of the Bahá'ís of Brunei will be held this year, during the second weekend of the Riḍván 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 Center 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 Riḍván 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 São 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 Bahrayn; 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 Riḍván 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 Center, 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 threefold 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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 weekend, 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 traveling 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 coordinate 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 coequal 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 behavior 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 Center 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 worldwide 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 traveling teacher program 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 behavior towards your neighbor should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be recreated 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 honor, strength and maturity. It is this marked contrast between the vigor, 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."

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

27 May 1966

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

... You query the timing of the election of The Universal House of Justice in view of the Guardian's statement: "... given favorable circumstances, under which the Bahá'ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule, may be enabled to elect their national representatives ... the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed." On 19th April 1947 the Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf by his secretary, replied to the inquiry of an individual believer about this passage: "At the time he referred to Russia there were Bahá'ís there, now the Community has practically ceased to exist; therefore the formation of the International House of Justice cannot depend on a Russian National Spiritual Assembly. But other strong National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be built up before it can be established."

You suggest the possibility that, for the good of the Cause, certain information concerning the succession to Shoghi Effendi is being withheld from the believers. We assure you that nothing whatsoever is being withheld from the friends for whatever reason. There is no doubt at all that in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Shoghi Effendi was the authority designated to appoint his successor, but he had no children and all the surviving Aghṣán had broken the Covenant. Thus, as the Hands of the Cause stated in 1957, it is clear that there was no one he could have appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Will. To have made an appointment outside the clear and specific provisions of the Master's Will and Testament would obviously have been an impossible and unthinkable course of action for the Guardian, the divinely appointed upholder and defender of the Covenant. Moreover, that same Will had provided a clear means for the confirmation of the Guardian's appointment of his successor, as you are aware. The nine Hands to be elected by the body of the Hands were to give their assent by secret ballot to the Guardian's choice. In 1957 the entire body of the Hands, after fully investigating the matter, announced that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor and left no will. This is documented and established.

The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances that they contain. Do not forget that Shoghi Effendi said two things were necessary for a growing understanding of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: the passage of time and the guidance of The Universal House of Justice.

The infallibility of The Universal House of Justice, operating within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause. Although in the realm of interpretation the Guardian's pronouncements are always binding, in the area of the Guardian's participation in legislation it is always the decision of the House itself which must prevail. This is supported by the words of the Guardian: "The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

"Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances."

However, quite apart from his function as a member and sacred head for life of The Universal House of Justice, the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, had the right and duty "to define the sphere of the legislative action" of The Universal House of Justice. In other words, he had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of The Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it. No other person, apart from the Guardian, has the right or authority to make such definitions. The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is The Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, The Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as "clearly defined." Third, we must not forget the Guardian's written statement about these two Institutions: "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other."

As regards the need to have deductions made from the Writings to help in the formulation of the enactments of the House of Justice, there is the following text from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.



Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

Say, O people: Verily the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islam, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of The Universal House of Justice and the Spiritual Assemblies to protect and teach the Cause—indeed teaching is a sacred obligation placed upon every believer by Bahá'u'lláh. Similarly, although after the Master authoritative interpretation was exclusively vested in the Guardian, and although legislation is exclusively the function of The Universal House of Justice, these two Institutions are, in Shoghi Effendi's words, "complementary in their aim and purpose." "Their common, their fundamental object is to ensure the continuity of that divinely appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings." Whereas The Universal House of Justice cannot undertake any function which exclusively appertained to the Guardian, it must continue to pursue the object which it shares in common with the Guardianship.

As you point out with many quotations, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced

from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without The Universal House of Justice. Now The Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian. We must guard against two extremes: one is to argue that because there is no Guardian all that was written about the Guardianship and its position in the Bahá'í World Order is a dead letter and was unimportant; the other is to be so overwhelmed by the significance of the Guardianship as to underestimate the strength of the Covenant, or to be tempted to compromise with the clear texts in order to find somehow, in some way, a "Guardian."

Service to the Cause of God requires absolute fidelity and integrity and unwavering faith in Him. No good but only evil can come from taking the responsibility for the future of God's Cause into our own hands and trying to force it into ways that we wish it to go regardless of the clear texts and our own limitations. It is His Cause. He has promised that its light will not fail. Our part is to cling tenaciously to the revealed Word and to the Institutions that He has created to preserve His Covenant.

It is precisely in this connection that the believers must recognize the importance of intellectual honesty and humility. In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God's Revelation were overanxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary. Such compromises with essential truth, such intellectual pride, we must scrupulously avoid.

If some of the statements of The Universal House of Justice are not detailed the friends should realize that the cause of this is not secretiveness, but rather the determination of this body to refrain from interpreting the teachings and to preserve the truth of the Guardian's statement that "Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions ... need have no doubt or anxiety regarding the nature, the origin, or validity of the institutions which the adherents of the Faith are building up throughout the world. For these lie embedded in the teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarrantable inferences, or unauthorized interpretations of His Word."

A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi explained: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of

ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous." So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá'ís.

The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being. Time and again it has faced crises which have perplexed the believers, but each time the Cause, impelled by the immutable purpose of God, overcame the crisis and went on to greater heights.

However great may be our inability to understand the mystery and the implications of the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the strong cord to which all must cling with assurance is the Covenant. The emphatic and vigorous language of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament is at this time, as at the time of His own passing, the safeguard of the Cause:

"Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to The Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant...." And again: "... All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."

The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as "the last refuge of a tottering civilization," is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word. There are statements from the Master and the Guardian indicating that The Universal House of Justice, in addition to being the Highest Legislative Body of the Faith, is also the body to which all must turn, and is the "apex" of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as well as the "supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth." The Guardian has in his writings specified for the House of Justice such fundamental functions as the formulation of future worldwide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organization and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world. Furthermore in *God Passes By* the Guardian makes the following statement: "the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ... not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His Successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded." He has also, in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," written that the members of The Universal House of Justice "and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation."

As The Universal House of Justice has already announced, it cannot legislate to make possible the appointment of a successor to Shoghi Effendi, nor can it legislate to make possible the appointment of any more Hands of the Cause, but it must do everything within its power to ensure the performance of all those functions which it shares with these two mighty Institutions. It must make provision for the proper discharge in future of the functions of protection and propagation, which the administrative bodies share with the Guardianship and the Hands of the Cause; it must, in the absence of the Guardian, receive and disburse the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, in accordance with the following statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn"; it must make provision in its Constitution for the removal of any of its members who commits a sin "injurious to the common weal." Above all, it must, with perfect faith in Bahá'u'lláh, proclaim His Cause and enforce His Law so that the Most Great Peace shall be firmly established in this world and the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth shall be accomplished.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

10 June 1966

To the Bahá'í Youth in every Land

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In country after country the achievements of Bahá'í youth are increasingly advancing the work of the Nine Year Plan and arousing the admiration of their fellow believers. From the very beginning of the Bahá'í Era, youth have played a vital part in the promulgation of God's Revelation. The Báb Himself was but twenty-five years old when He declared His Mission, while many of the Letters of the Living were even younger. The Master, as a very young man, was called upon to shoulder heavy responsibilities in the service of His Father in Iraq and Turkey, and His brother, the Purest Branch, yielded up his life to God in the Most Great Prison at the age of twenty-two that the servants of God might "be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united." Shoghi Effendi was a student at Oxford when called to the throne of his guardianship, and many of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who won imperishable fame during the Ten Year Crusade, were young people. Let it, therefore, never be imagined that youth must await their years of maturity before they can render invaluable services to the Cause of God.

For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behavior are adopted. These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests—opportunities to truly apprehend the Teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed the Guardian wrote of the Bahá'í youth that it is they "who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it."

Those who now are in their teens and twenties are faced with a special challenge and can seize an opportunity that is unique in human history. During the Ten Year Crusade—the ninth part of that majestic process described so vividly by our beloved Guardian—the Community of the Most Great name spread with the speed of lightning over the major territories and islands of the globe, increased manifoldly its manpower and resources, saw the beginning of the entry of the peoples by troops into the Cause of God, and completed the structure of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Now, firmly established in the

world, the Cause, in the opening years of the tenth part of that same process, is perceptibly emerging from the obscurity that has, for the most part, shrouded it since its inception, and is arising to challenge the outworn concepts of a corrupt society and proclaim the solution for the agonizing problems of a disordered humanity. During the lifetime of those who are now young the condition of the world, and the place of the Bahá'í Cause in it, will change immeasurably, for we are entering a highly critical phase in this era of transition.

Three great fields of service lie open before young Bahá'ís, in which they will simultaneously be remaking the character of human society and preparing themselves for the work that they can undertake later in their lives.

First, the foundation of all their other accomplishments is their study of the teachings, the spiritualization of their lives and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. As the moral standards of the people around us collapse and decay, whether of the centuries-old civilizations of the East, the more recent cultures of Christendom and Islám; or of the rapidly changing tribal societies of the world, the Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with all mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbors with a bright and friendly face and be a beacon light and a haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.

The second field of service, which is linked intimately with the first, is teaching the Faith, particularly to their fellow-youth, among whom are some of the most open and seeking minds in the world. Not yet having acquired all the responsibilities of a family or a long-established home and job, youth can the more easily choose where they will live and study or work. In the world at large young people travel hither and thither seeking amusement, education and experiences. Bahá'í youth, bearing the incomparable treasure of the Word of God for this Day, can harness this mobility into service for mankind and can choose their places of residence, their areas of travel and their types of work with the goal in mind of how they can best serve the Faith.

The third field of service is the preparation by youth for their later years. It is the obligation of a Bahá'í to educate his children; likewise it is the duty of the children to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences and to learn a trade or a profession whereby they, in turn, can earn their living and support their families. This, for a Bahá'í youth, is in itself a service to God, a service, moreover, which can be combined with teaching the Faith and often with pioneering. The Bahá'í community will need men and women of many skills and qualifications; for, as it grows in size the sphere of its activities in the life of society will increase and diversify. Let Bahá'í youth, therefore, consider the best ways in which they can use and develop their native abilities for the service of mankind and the Cause of God, whether this be as farmers, teachers, doctors, artisans, musicians or any one of the multitude of livelihoods that are open to them.

When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá'í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.

Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service and study of the teachings, Bahá'í youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá'í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action. Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision. In this field Bahá'í youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigor, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs. Youth also take part in the life of the Bahá'í community as a whole and promote a society in which all generations—elderly, middle-aged, youth, children—are fully integrated and make up an organic whole. By refusing to carry over the antagonisms and mistrust between the generations which perplex and bedevil modern society they will again demonstrate the healing and life-giving nature of their religion.

The Nine Year Plan has just entered its third year. The youth have already played a vital part in winning its goals. We now call upon them, with great love and highest hopes and the assurance of our fervent prayers, to consider, individually and in consultation, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances, those steps which they should take now to deepen themselves in their knowledge of the divine message, to develop their characters after the pattern of the Master, to acquire those skills, trades and professions in which they can best serve God and man, to intensify their service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and to radiate its message to the seekers among their contemporaries.

[signed: 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 favor 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 Baḥrayn; 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 Center 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 Riḍván 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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 traveling-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 Center, whose exhilaration we wish every believer to share.

At the World Center 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 13 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 Center whose function is to provide teaching and deepening aids to all National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as to store and index audiovisual 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 honor 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 Ṭarāzu'lláh Samandarí, whose eyes were blessed by beholding Bahá'u'lláh, will represent The Universal House of Justice at the Intercontinental 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 cooperation. 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 worldwide 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 Center itself, involving a necessary and inevitable increase in facilities to serve the growing needs of the Faith; support of the vital teaching program 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 vigor 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 honor 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 worldwide 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 Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Ugo Giachery, Ṭaráẓu'lláh Samandarí, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, Paul Haney, Abu'l-Qásim Faizi, who will represent The Universal House of Justice at the Intercontinental Conferences in October to be held in Panama, Sydney, Chicago, Kampala, Frankfurt and New Delhi respectively, will gather at the World Center 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 program. 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. Honored 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 programs, 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.

Worldwide 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 coordination with the programs 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 coordination 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 endeavor 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 program. 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! ERELONG SHALL THE CLAMOR 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 endeavors of the friends may be the means by which this glory and felicity will speedily come to pass.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 July 1967

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In just over three months the period of the worldwide proclamation of the Faith will be opened at the six Intercontinental Conferences called to celebrate the centenary of the revelation of the Súriy-i-Mulúk. Those conferences will provide an opportunity for representatives of the National Spiritual Assemblies to exchange ideas and coordinate plans for the proclamation which will continue throughout the remaining four and a half years of the Plan.

The stimulating effect of this interchange of ideas will produce greatly increased momentum throughout the world, but inasmuch as many projects must be worked out before that date, we feel a few additional comments on the nature and purpose of proclamation will be helpful now.

Proclamation comprises a number of activities, of which publicity is only one. The Universal House of Justice itself will be conveying the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the heads of all states, but, in addition to this, one of the most important duties of each National Spiritual Assembly is to acquaint leaders of thought and prominent men and women in its country with the fundamental aims, the history and the present status and achievements of the Cause. Such an activity must be carried out with the utmost wisdom, discretion and dignity. Publicity connected with such approaches must be weighed very carefully, as it may be unwise or discourteous. This is, of course, a long-range program, for such things cannot be rushed, but it must be given constant attention.

Another aspect of proclamation is a series of teaching programs designed to reach every stratum of human society—programs that should be pursued diligently and wisely, using every available resource.

Publicity itself should be well-conceived, dignified and reverent. A flamboyant approach which may succeed in drawing much initial attention to the Cause, may ultimately prove to have produced a revulsion which would require great effort to overcome. The standard of dignity and reverence set by the beloved Guardian should always be upheld, particularly in musical and dramatic items; and photographs of the Master should not be used indiscriminately. This does not mean that activities of the youth, for example, should be stultified; one can be exuberant without being irreverent or undermining the dignity of the Cause.

Every land has its own conditions, thus the kind of proclamation activity to be followed in each country should be decided by its National Spiritual Assembly. National Spiritual Assemblies need not follow or copy programs initiated in other countries.

In all proclamation activities, follow-up is of supreme importance. Proclamation, expansion and consolidation are mutually helpful activities which must be carefully interrelated. In some places it is desirable to open a teaching campaign with publicity—in others it is wiser to establish first a solid local community before publicizing the Faith or encouraging contacts with prominent people. Here, again, wisdom is needed.

We have been elated by the enthusiasm with which the Bahá'í community is preparing for the challenging months and years ahead, and we eagerly await those days but a few short months away which will open a period of such promise for the diffusion of God's Word.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



15 October 1967

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The following cable has just been sent to the United States National Spiritual Assembly for publication in *Bahá'í News*. Please share it with all friends in your jurisdiction.

HEARTS FILLED PROFOUND GRATITUDE REJOICE ANNOUNCE INAUGURATION THIRD PHASE NINE YEAR PLAN THROUGH SUCCESSFUL CONSUMMATION SIX INTERCONTINENTAL CONFERENCES ATTENDED BY 9,200 BELIEVERS INCLUDING NEARLY ALL HANDS CAUSE LARGE NUMBER BOARD MEMBERS REPRESENTATIVES ALMOST ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES BAHÁ'Í WORLD OVER 140 TERRITORIES AND HOST OF ASIAN AFRICAN AMERINDIAN TRIBES. INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGE CONFERRED PARTICIPANTS THROUGH VIEWING PORTRAIT ABHÁ BEAUTY. SPIRIT HOLY LAND AND ADRIANOPLE CONVEYED SIX DISTINGUISHED REPRESENTATIVES HOUSE JUSTICE. FIRST PRESENTATIONS BEHALF HOUSE JUSTICE PROCLAMATION BOOK HEADS OF STATE MADE BEFORE AND DURING CONFERENCE. FRUITFUL DELIBERATIONS HELD PROCLAMATION EXECUTION REMAINING GOALS PLAN. SOLIDARITY BAHÁ'Í WORLD FURTHER EVINced THROUGH INGENIOUS SCHEME TELEPHONIC EXCHANGE GREETINGS ALL SIX CONFERENCES. SPIRITUAL POTENCIES THIS NEW PHASE REINFORCED THROUGH FORMAL LAYING BY AMATU'L-BAHÁ OF CORNERSTONE MOTHER TEMPLE LATIN AMERICA. OVER 230 OFFERS MADE AT CONFERENCES JOIN RANKS VALIANT PIONEERS CAUSE. RAISE SUPPLIANT HANDS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ENDOW FRIENDS EVERY LAND FRESH MEASURE CELESTIAL STRENGTH ENABLE THEM PURSUE WITH INCREASED VISION UNABATED RESOLVE GLORIOUS GOALS AHEAD UNTIL THIS NEW PERIOD PROCLAMATION YIELDS ITS SHARE IN DIVINELY PROPELLED PROCESS ESTABLISHMENT KINGDOM GOD HEARTS MEN.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

8 December 1967

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

... we will gladly attempt to clarify some of the points which bewilder you in the relationship of Bahá'ís to politics. This is a matter of very great importance, particularly in these days when the world situation is so confused; an unwise act or statement by a Bahá'í in one country could result in a grave setback for the Faith there or elsewhere—and even loss of the lives of fellow-believers.

The whole conduct of a Bahá'í in relation to the problems, sufferings and bewilderment of his fellowmen should be viewed in the light of God's purpose for mankind in this age and the processes He has set in motion for its achievement.

When Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Message to the world in the nineteenth century He made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind was its unification. As He says, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203) To this day, however, you will find most people take the opposite point of view: they look upon unity as an ultimate almost unattainable goal and concentrate first on remedying all the other ills of mankind. If they did but know it, these other ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease—disunity.

Bahá'u'lláh has, furthermore, stated that the revivification of mankind and the curing of all its ills can be achieved only through the instrumentality of His Faith. "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?" (*Gleanings*, XCIX) "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error." (*Gleanings*, CXX) In similar vein, the beloved Guardian wrote:

Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen—however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise, no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance,

no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built. No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world—a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times—provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, 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.

*(The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 33–34)*

We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce in God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body—of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace—is that of the Bahá'ís, who are laboring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellowmen, thus conferring upon them eternal life.

The working out of God's Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated. It is to this work that we must devote all our energies, for there is no one else to do it. So vital is this function of the Bahá'ís that Bahá'u'lláh has written: "O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny. Suffer not your labors to be wasted through the vain imaginations which certain hearts have devised. Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred scroll. With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God." (*Gleanings*, XCVI)

Because love for our fellowmen and anguish at their plight are essential parts of a true Bahá'í's life, we are continually drawn to do what we can to help them. It is vitally important that we do so whenever the

occasion presents itself, for our actions must say the same thing as our words—but this compassion for our fellows must not be allowed to divert our energies into channels which are ultimately doomed to failure, causing us to neglect the most important and fundamental work of all. There are hundreds of thousands of well-wishers of mankind who devote their lives to works of relief and charity, but a pitiful few to do the work which God Himself most wants done: the spiritual awakening and regeneration of mankind.

It is often through our misguided feeling that we can somehow aid our fellows better by some activity outside the Faith, that Bahá'ís are led to indulge in politics. This is a dangerous delusion. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf: "What we Bahá'ís must face is the fact that society is rapidly disintegrating—so rapidly that moral issues which were clear a half century ago are now hopelessly confused, and what is more, thoroughly mixed up with battling political interests. That is why the Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its administration. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the governments of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed." (*Bahá'í News*, No. 241, p. 14) "We must build up our Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their own way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary they will destroy us." (*Bahá'í News*, No. 215, p. 1)

Other instructions from the Guardian, covering the same theme in more detail, can be found on pages 24 and 29 to 32 of *Principles of Bahá'í Administration* (1963 edition); you are no doubt already familiar with these.

The key to a true understanding of these principles seems to be in these words of Bahá'u'lláh: "O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá! This, verily, is the commandment which this wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you." (*Gleanings*, XLIII).

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

9 May 1968

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

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.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

21 June 1968

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

REJOICE ANNOUNCE MOMENTOUS DECISION ESTABLISH ELEVEN CONTINENTAL BOARDS  
COUNSELORS PROTECTION PROPAGATION FAITH THREE EACH FOR AFRICA AMERICAS ASIA ONE  
EACH FOR AUSTRALASIA EUROPE. ADOPTION THIS SIGNIFICANT STEP FOLLOWING  
CONSULTATION WITH HANDS CAUSE GOD ENSURES EXTENSION FUTURE APPOINTED FUNCTIONS  
THEIR INSTITUTION. CONTINENTAL BOARDS ENTRUSTED IN CLOSE COLLABORATION HANDS  
CAUSE WITH RESPONSIBILITY DIRECTION AUXILIARY BOARDS AND CONSULTATION NATIONAL  
SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES. HANDS CAUSE GOD WILL HENCEFORTH INCREASE INTERCONTINENTAL  
SERVICES ASSUMING WORLDWIDE ROLE PROTECTION PROPAGATION FAITH. MEMBERS  
AUXILIARY BOARDS WILL REPORT BE RESPONSIBLE TO CONTINENTAL BOARDS COUNSELORS.  
HANDS CAUSE RESIDING HOLY LAND IN ADDITION SERVING LIAISON BETWEEN UNIVERSAL  
HOUSE JUSTICE AND CONTINENTAL BOARDS COUNSELORS WILL ASSIST FUTURE  
ESTABLISHMENT INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER HOLY LAND FORESHADOWED WRITINGS  
BELOVED GUARDIAN. DETAILS NEW DEVELOPMENTS BEING CONVEYED BY LETTER. FERVENTLY  
SUPPLICATING HOLY THRESHOLD DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS FURTHER STEP IRRESISTIBLE  
UNFOLDMENT MIGHTY ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

24 June 1968

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The majestic unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's world-redeeming administrative system has been marked by the successive establishment of the various institutions and agencies which constitute the framework of that divinely created Order. Thus, more than a quarter of a century after the emergence of the first National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God was formally established, with the appointment by the beloved Guardian, in conformity with the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, of the first contingent of these high-ranking officers of the Faith. Following the passing of the Guardian of the Cause of God, it fell to the House of Justice to devise a way, within the Administrative Order, of developing "the Institution of the Hands of the Cause with a view to extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation," and this was made a goal of the Nine Year Plan. Much thought and study has been given to the question over the past four years, and the texts have been collected and reviewed. During the last two months, this goal, as announced in our cable to the National Conventions, has been the object of prolonged and prayerful consultation between The Universal House of Justice and the Hands of the Cause of God. All this made evident the framework within which this goal was to be achieved, namely:

The Universal House of Justice sees no way in which additional Hands of the Cause of God can be appointed.

The absence of the Guardian of the Faith brought about an entirely new relationship between The Universal House of Justice and the Hands of the Cause and called for the progressive unfoldment by The Universal House of Justice of the manner in which the Hands of the Cause would carry out their divinely conferred functions of protection and propagation.

Whatever new development or institution is initiated should come into operation as soon as possible in order to reinforce and supplement the work of the Hands of the Cause while at the same time taking full advantage of the opportunity of having the Hands themselves assist in launching and guiding the new procedures.

Any such institution must grow and operate in harmony with the principles governing the functioning of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

In the light of these considerations The Universal House of Justice decided, as announced in its recent cable, to establish Continental Boards of Counselors for the protection and propagation of the Faith. Their duties will include directing the Auxiliary Boards in their respective areas, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the Hands of the Cause and The Universal House of Justice informed concerning the conditions of the Cause in their areas.

Initially eleven Boards of Counselors have been appointed, one for each of the following areas: Northwestern Africa, Central and East Africa, Southern Africa, North America, Central America, South America, Western Asia, Southeastern Asia, Northeastern Asia, Australasia and Europe.

The members of these Boards of Counselors will serve for a term, or terms, the length of which will be determined and announced at a later date, and while serving in this capacity, will not be eligible for membership on national or local administrative bodies. One member of each Continental Board of Counselors has been designated as Trustee of the Continental Fund for its area.

The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation will henceforth report to the Continental Boards of Counselors who will appoint or replace members of the Auxiliary Boards as circumstances may require. Such appointments and replacements as may be necessary in the initial stages will take place after consultation with the Hand or Hands previously assigned to the continent or zone.

The Hands of the Cause of God have the prerogative and obligation to consult with the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies on any subject which, in their view, affects the interests of the Cause. The Hands residing in the Holy Land will act as liaison between The Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counselors, and will also assist The Universal House of Justice in setting up, at a propitious time, an international teaching center in the Holy Land, as anticipated in the Guardian's writings.

The Hands of the Cause of God are one of the most precious assets the Bahá'í world possesses. Released from administration of the Auxiliary Boards, they will be able to concentrate their energies on the more primary responsibilities of general protection and propagation, "PRESERVATION [of the] SPIRITUAL HEALTH [of the] BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES" and the "VITALITY [of the] FAITH" of the Bahá'ís throughout the world. The House of Justice will call upon them to undertake special missions on its behalf, to represent it on both Bahá'í and other occasions and to keep it informed of the welfare of the Cause. While the Hands of the Cause will, naturally, have special concern for the affairs of the Cause in the areas in which they reside, they will operate increasingly on an intercontinental level, a factor which will lend tremendous impetus to the diffusion throughout the Bahá'í world of the spiritual inspiration channeled through them—the Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth.

With joyful hearts we proclaim this further unfoldment of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh and join our prayers to those of the friends throughout the East and the West that Bahá'u'lláh may continue to shower His confirmations upon the efforts of His servants in the safeguarding and promotion of His Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

August 1968

To the Hands of the Cause of God and the Bahá'í Friends assembled in Palermo, Sicily, at the First Bahá'í Oceanic Conference

Dearly loved Friends,

The event which we commemorate at this first Bahá'í Oceanic Conference is unique. Neither the migration of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the region of Aleppo, nor the journey of Moses towards the Promised Land, nor the flight into Egypt of Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus, nor yet the Hegira of Muḥammad can compare with the voyage made by God's Supreme Manifestation one hundred years ago from Gallipoli to the Most Great Prison. Bahá'u'lláh's voyage was forced upon Him by the two despots who were His chief adversaries in a determined attempt to extirpate once and for all His Cause, and the decree of His fourth banishment came when the tide of His prophetic utterance was in full flood. The proclamation of His Message to mankind had begun; the sun of His majesty had reached its zenith and, as attested by the devotion of His followers, the respect of the population and the esteem of officials and the representatives of foreign powers, His ascendancy had become manifest. At such a time He was confronted with the decree of final exile to a remote, obscure and pestilential outpost of the decrepit Turkish empire.

Bahá'u'lláh knew, better than His royal persecutors, the magnitude of the crisis, with all its potentiality for disaster, which confronted Him. Consigned to a prison cell, debarred from access to those to whom His Message must be addressed, cut off from His followers save for the handful who were to accompany Him, and deprived even of association with them, it was apparent that by all earthly standards the ship of His Cause must founder, His mission wither and die.

But it was the Lord of Hosts with Whom they were dealing. Knowing the sufferings which faced Him His one thought was to instill confidence and fortitude into His followers, to whom He immediately dispatched sublime Tablets asserting the power of His Cause to overcome all opposition. "Should they attempt to conceal its light on the continent," is one of His powerful utterances on this theme, "it will assuredly rear its head in the midmost heart of the ocean, and, raising its voice, proclaim 'I am the lifegiver of the world!'" All the afflictions which men could heap upon Him were thrown back from the rock of His adamant will like spray from the ocean. His patient submission to the affronts of men, His fortitude, His divine genius transformed the somber notes of disaster into the diapason of triumph. At the nadir of His worldly fortunes He raised His standard of victory above the Prison City and poured forth upon mankind the healing balm of His laws and ordinances revealed in His Most Holy Book. "Until our time," comments 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "no such thing has ever occurred."

Contemplating this awe-inspiring, supernal episode, we may obtain a clearer understanding of our own times, a more confident view of their outcome and a deeper apprehension of the part we are called upon to play. That the violent disruption which has seized the entire planet is beyond the ability of men to assuage, unaided by God's revelation, is a truth repeatedly and forcibly set forth in our Writings. The old order cannot be repaired; it is being rolled up before our eyes. The moral decay and disorder convulsing human society must run their course; we can neither arrest nor divert them.

Our task is to build the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social or educational programs, let us, with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and sheltered within its impregnable stronghold, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, demonstrate the Bahá'í way of life. Wherever a Bahá'í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present-day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world's gloom deepens the light of Bahá'í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.

The great sea, on one of whose chief islands you are now gathered, within whose hinterland and islands have flourished the Jewish, the Christian and Islamic civilizations is a befitting scene for the first Oceanic Bahá'í Conference. Two millenniums ago, in this arena, the disciples of Christ performed such deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice as are remembered to this day and are forever enshrined in the annals of His Cause. A thousand years later the lands, bordering the southern and western shores of this sea witnessed the glory of Islam's Golden Age.

In the day of the Promised One this same sea achieved eternal fame through its association with the Heroic and Formative Ages of His Cause. It bore upon its bosom the King of kings Himself; the Center of His Covenant crossed and recrossed it in the course of His epoch-making journeys to the West, during which He left the indelible imprint of His presence upon European and African lands; the Sign of God on earth frequently journeyed upon it. It enshrines within its depths the mortal remains of the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker and around its shores lies the dust of apostles, martyrs and pioneers. Forty-six Knights of Bahá'u'lláh are identified with seven of its islands and five of its territories. Through such and many other episodes, Mediterranean lands—ancient home of civilizations—have been endowed with spiritual potentiality to dissolve the encrustations of those once glorious but now moribund social orders and to radiate once again the light of Divine guidance.

Through dedicated, heroic and sacrificial deeds during the course of the beloved Guardian's ministry, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh was established in this area. Eight pillars of The Universal House of Justice were raised, the first of an even larger number to be established now and during the course of future plans, to include, as envisioned by Shoghi Effendi, National Spiritual Assemblies in major islands of that historic sea.

The timing of such exciting developments is dependent upon the outcome of the Nine Year Plan. At this midway point of that Plan, although great strides have been made, more than half the goals are still to be won. The greatest deficiencies are in the opening of new centers where Bahá'ís reside and the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies, which inevitably affects the ability to establish National Spiritual Assemblies. A dramatic upsurge of teaching—effective teaching—is necessary to make up the leeway; pioneers are needed, teachers must travel, funds must be provided. It is our hope that there will be engendered at this Conference, through your enthusiasm, prayers and spirit of devotion, a great spiritual dynamic to reinforce that grand momentum which, mounting steadily during the next four years, must carry the community of the Most Great Name to overwhelming victory in 1973.

Dear friends, within a few short days the observance of the Centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Holy Land will take place. The hearts and minds of the entire Bahá'í world will be focused on the Most Holy Shrine, where those privileged to attend this commemoration will circumambulate that Holy Spot and raise their prayers to the Lord of the Age. Let them remember their fellow-believers at home and supplicate from the depths of their souls for such bounties and favors to descend upon the friends of God everywhere as to cause them to rise as one man to demonstrate their love for Him Who suffered for them, by such deeds of sacrifice and devotion as shall outshine the deeds of the past and sweep away every obstacle from the onward march of the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

9 October 1968

To the Bahá'í Youth in Every Land

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the two years since we last addressed the youth of the Bahá'í world many remarkable advances have been made in the fortunes of the Faith. Not the least of these is the enrollment under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh of a growing army of young men and women eager to serve His Cause. The zeal, the enthusiasm, the steadfastness and the devotion of the youth in every land has brought great joy and assurance to our hearts.

During the last days of August and the first days of September, when nearly two thousand believers from all over the world gathered in the Holy Land to commemorate the Centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival on these sacred shores, we had an opportunity to observe at first hand those qualities of good character, selfless service and determined effort exemplified in the youth who served as volunteer helpers, and we wish to express our gratitude for their loving assistance and for their example.

Many of them offered to pioneer, but one perplexing question recurred: Shall I continue my education, or should I pioneer, now? Undoubtedly this same question is in the mind of every young Bahá'í wishing to dedicate his life to the advancement of the Faith. There is no stock answer which applies to all situations; the beloved Guardian gave different answers to different individuals on this question. Obviously circumstances vary with each individual case. Each individual must decide how he can best serve the Cause. In making this decision, it will be helpful to weigh the following factors:

Upon becoming a Bahá'í one's whole life is, or should become devoted to the progress of the Cause of God, and every talent or faculty he possesses is ultimately committed to this overriding life objective. Within this framework he must consider, among other things, whether by continuing his education now he can be a more effective pioneer later, or alternatively whether the urgent need for pioneers, while possibilities for teaching are still open, outweighs an anticipated increase in effectiveness. This is not an easy decision, since oftentimes the spirit which prompts the pioneering offer is more important than one's academic attainments.

- One's liability for military service may be a factor in timing the offer of pioneer service.

- One may have outstanding obligations to others, including those who may be dependent on him for support.
- It may be possible to combine a pioneer project with a continuing educational program. Consideration may also be given to the possibility that a pioneering experience, even though it interrupts the formal educational program, may prove beneficial in the long run in that studies would later be resumed with a more mature outlook.
- The urgency of a particular goal which one is especially qualified to fill and for which there are no other offers.
- The fact that the need for pioneers will undoubtedly be with us for many generations to come, and that therefore there will be many calls in future for pioneering service.
- The principle of consultation also applies. One may have the obligation to consult others, such as one's parents, one's Local and National Assemblies, and the pioneering committees.
- Finally, bearing in mind the principle of sacrificial service and the unfailing promises Bahá'u'lláh ordained for those who arise to serve His Cause, one should pray and meditate on what his course of action will be. Indeed, it often happens that the answer will be found in no other way.

We assure the youth that we are mindful of the many important decisions they must make as they tread the path of service to Bahá'u'lláh. We will offer our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold that all will be divinely guided and that they will attract the blessings of the All-Merciful.

Deepest Bahá'í love,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Riḍván 1969

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 Counselors, 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 Counselors, 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 Ḥaẓīratu'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 Riḍván 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 Riḍván 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'ís 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 Riḍván 1970 the number of National Spiritual Assemblies will be raised to ninety-three.

In harmony with the worldwide growth of the Cause the World Center of the Faith is also developing rapidly. The pilgrims, the beloved Guardian has said, are the lifeblood of this World Center 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 labor 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 worldwide activity, the hallmark 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 traveling 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 endeavor 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



26 May 1969

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have reviewed your letter of April 11th, asking about the teachings of the Faith on self-defense and any guidance on individual conduct in the face of increasing civil disorder in North American cities.

From the texts you already have available it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that it is preferable to be killed in the path of God's good pleasure than to kill, and that organized religious attack against Bahá'ís should never turn into any kind of warfare, as this is strictly prohibited in our Writings.

A hitherto untranslated Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, points out that in the case of attack by robbers and highwaymen, a Bahá'í should not surrender himself, but should try, as far as circumstances permit, to defend himself, and later on lodge a complaint with the government authorities. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, he also indicates that in an emergency when there is no legal force at hand to appeal to, a Bahá'í is justified in defending his life. In another letter the Guardian has further pointed out that the assault of an irresponsible assailant upon a Bahá'í should be resisted by the Bahá'í, who would be justified, under such circumstances, in protecting his life.

The House of Justice does not wish at the present time to go beyond the guidelines given in the above-mentioned statements. The question is basically a matter of conscience, and in each case the Bahá'í involved must use his judgment in determining when to stop in self-defense lest his action deteriorate into retaliation.

Of course the above principles apply also in cases when a Bahá'í finds himself involved in situations of civil disorder. We have, however, advised the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States that under the present circumstances in that country it is preferable that Bahá'ís do not buy nor own arms for their protection or the protection of their families.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

1 October 1969

To the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A number of questions have been raised concerning the work of the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, and it has been suggested that Auxiliary Board members be permitted to work regularly with National Spiritual Assemblies and national committees. We have carefully considered again the various factors involved and have decided that we must uphold the principle that such direct consultations should be exceptional rather than the rule.

It is the responsibility of Spiritual Assemblies, assisted by their committees, to organize and direct the teaching work, and in doing so they must, naturally, also do all they can to stimulate and inspire the friends. It is, however, inevitable that the Assemblies and committees, being burdened with the administration of the teaching work as well as with all other aspects of Bahá'í community life, will be unable to spend as much time as they would wish on stimulating the believers.

Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principal task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power. This is a vital activity, and if they are to be able to perform it adequately they must avoid becoming involved in the work of administration. For example, when Auxiliary Board members arouse believers to pioneer, any believer who expresses his desire to do so should be referred to the appropriate committee which will then organize the project. Counselors and Auxiliary Board members should not, themselves, organize pioneering or travel teaching projects. Thus it is seen that the Auxiliary Boards should work closely with the grass roots of the community: the individual believers, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies, advising, stimulating and assisting them. The Counselors are responsible for stimulating, counseling and assisting National Spiritual Assemblies, and also work with individuals, groups and Local Assemblies.

It is always possible, of course, for Counselors to depute an Auxiliary Board member to meet with a National Spiritual Assembly for a particular purpose, but this should not become a regular practice. Similarly, if the National Spiritual Assembly agrees, it may be advisable for an Auxiliary Board member to meet occasionally with a national committee to clarify the situation in the area and share information and ideas thoroughly. But this also should not become regular. Were it to do so there would be grave danger of inhibiting the proper working of these two institutions, vitiating and undermining the collaboration that must essentially exist between the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. It would diffuse the energies and time of the Auxiliary Board members through their becoming involved in

the administration of teaching. It could lead to the Auxiliary Board member's gradually taking over the direction of the national committee, usurping the function of the National Assembly, or to his becoming merely a traveling teacher sent hither and thither at the direction of the committee or National Assembly.

It is, of course vital that information be shared fully and promptly, as has been explained in the compilation on the work of Auxiliary Board members that was circulated on March 25, 1969. The ways of ensuring this should be worked out by the Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies and methods may vary from area to area.

Reports and recommendations for action, however, are quite different. Auxiliary Board members should send theirs to the Counselors and not to National Assemblies or national committees directly. It is possible that the Counselors may reject or modify the recommendation; or, if they accept it and pass it on to the National Spiritual Assembly, the National Assembly may decide to refuse it. For an Auxiliary Board member to make recommendations directly to a national committee would lose the benefit of knowledge and experience in a wider field than that of which the Auxiliary Board member is aware, and would short-circuit and undermine the authority of both the Counselors and the National Assembly.

Similarly, although an Auxiliary Board member can and should receive information from the National Assemblies and national committees, his primary source of information about the community should be his own direct contacts with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups and individual believers. In this way the Counselors as well as the National Spiritual Assemblies have the benefit of two independent sources of information about the community: through the Auxiliary Board members on the one hand, and through the national committees on the other.

Assemblies sometimes misunderstand what is meant by the statement that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members are concerned with the teaching work and not with administration. It is taken to mean that they may not give advice on administrative matters. This is quite wrong. One of the things that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members should watch and report on is the proper working of administrative institutions. The statement that they do not have anything to do with administration means, simply, that they do not administer. They do not direct or organize the teaching work nor do they adjudicate in matters of personal conflict or personal problems. All these activities fall within the sphere of responsibility of the Spiritual Assemblies. But if an Auxiliary Board member finds a Local Spiritual Assembly functioning incorrectly he should call its attention to the appropriate Texts; likewise if, in his work with the community, an Auxiliary Board member finds that the teaching work is being held up by inefficiency of national committees, he should report this in detail to the Counselors who will then decide whether to refer it to the National Spiritual Assembly concerned. Similarly, if the Counselors find that a National Spiritual Assembly is not functioning properly, they should not hesitate to consult with the National Spiritual Assembly about this in a frank and loving way.

It is the Spiritual Assemblies who plan and direct the work, but these plans should be well known to the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, because one of the ways in which they can assist the Assemblies is by urging the believers continually to support the plans of the Assemblies. If a National Spiritual

Assembly has adopted one goal as preeminent in a year, the Auxiliary Board members should bear this in mind in all their contacts with the believers and should direct their attention to the plans of the National Assembly, and stimulate them to enthusiastically support them.

The Counselors in each continental zone have wide latitude in the carrying out of their work. Likewise they should give to each Auxiliary Board member considerable freedom of action within his own allocated area. Although the Counselors should regularly direct the work of the Auxiliary Board members, the latter should realize that they need not wait for direction; the nature of their work is such that they should be continually engaged in it according to their own best judgment, even if they are given no specific tasks to perform. Above all the Auxiliary Board members should build up a warm and loving relationship between themselves and the believers in their area so that the Local Spiritual Assemblies will spontaneously turn to them for advice and assistance.

We assure you all of our fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh upon the strenuous and highly meritorious services that you are performing with such devotion in His path.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

16 November 1969

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Friends,

In the worsening world situation, fraught with pain of war, violence and the sudden uprooting of long-established institutions, can be seen the fulfillment of the prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh and the oft-repeated warnings of the Master and the beloved Guardian about the inevitable fate of a lamentably defective social system, an unenlightened leadership and a rebellious and unbelieving humanity. Governments and peoples of both the developed and developing nations, and other human institutions, secular and religious, finding themselves helpless to reverse the trend of the catastrophic events of the day, stand bewildered and overpowered by the magnitude and complexity of the problems facing them. At this fateful hour in human history many, unfortunately, seem content to stand aside and wring their hands in despair or else join in the babel of shouting and protestation which loudly objects, but offers no solution to the woes and afflictions plaguing our age.

Nevertheless a greater and greater number of thoughtful and fair-minded men and women are recognizing in the clamor of contention, grief and destruction, now reaching such horrendous proportions, the evidences of Divine chastisement, and turning their faces towards God are becoming increasingly receptive to His Word. Doubtless the present circumstances, though tragic and awful in their immediate consequences, are serving to sharpen the focus on the indispensability of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the needs of the present age, and will provide many opportunities to reach countless waiting souls, hungry and thirsty for Divine guidance.

It is these opportunities which we must seize before it is too late. What is needed now is the awakening of all believers to the immediacy of the challenge so that each may assume his share of the responsibility for taking the Teachings to all humanity. Universal participation, a salient objective of the Nine Year Plan, must be pressed toward attainment in every continent, country and island of the globe. Every Bahá'í, however humble or inarticulate, must become intent on fulfilling his role as a bearer of the Divine Message. Indeed, how can a true believer remain silent while around us men cry out in anguish for truth, love and unity to descend upon this world?

We all know how often the Master and the beloved Guardian called upon the friends to consciously strive to be more loving, more united, more dedicated and prayerful than ever before in order to overcome the atmosphere of present-day society which is unloving, disunited, careless of right and wrong and heedless of God. "... when we see the increasing darkness in the world today," the Guardian's secretary wrote on his

behalf, “we can fully realize that unless the Message of Bahá’u’lláh reaches into the hearts of men and transforms them, there can be no peace and no spiritual progress in the future.”

The Nine Year Plan is the current stage in the achievement of that sublime objective. It is now imperative for every Bahá’í to set for himself individual teaching goals. The admonition of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to lead at least one new soul to the Faith each year and the exhortation of Shoghi Effendi to hold a Bahá’í fireside in one’s home every Bahá’í month are examples of individual goals. Many have capacities to do even more, but this alone will assure final and complete victory for the Plan.

We call upon the friends to join with us in prayer during the Feast of Sulṭán that we will all become so imbued with zeal, courage and enthusiasm that from this day to the end of the Nine Year Plan nothing will be able to stay the victorious onward march of the followers of the Most Great Name. May our efforts be worthy of the blessings and confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



7 December 1969

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your recent letter, in which you share with us the questions that have occurred to some of the youth in studying "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," has been carefully considered, and we feel that we should comment both on the particular passage you mention and on a related passage in the same work, because both bear on the relationship between the Guardianship and The Universal House of Justice.

The first passage concerns the Guardian's duty to insist upon a reconsideration by his fellow members in The Universal House of Justice of any enactment which he believes conflicts with the meaning and departs from the spirit of the Sacred Writings. The second passage concerns the infallibility of The Universal House of Justice without the Guardian, namely Shoghi Effendi's statement that "Without such an institution [the Guardianship] ... the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn."

Some of the youth, you indicate, were puzzled as to how to reconcile the former of these two passages with such statements as that in the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which affirms that The Universal House of Justice is "freed from all error."

Just as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not in any way contradict the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but, in the Guardian's words, "confirms, supplements, and correlates the provisions of the Aqdas," so the writings of the Guardian contradict neither the revealed Word nor the interpretations of the Master. In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.

The Guardian and The Universal House of Justice have certain duties and functions in common; each also operates within a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explained, "... it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that The Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed." He goes on to affirm, "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested." It is impossible to conceive that two centers of

authority, which the Master has stated “are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One,” could conflict with one another, because both are vehicles of the same Divine Guidance.

The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference. Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of The Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian’s membership or presence on that body. Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his “Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” have both explicitly stated that the elected members of The Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance. Furthermore the Guardian himself in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* asserted that “It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to The Universal House of Justice by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitábu’l-Aqdas, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions.”

While the specific responsibility of the Guardian is the interpretation of the Word, he is also invested with all the powers and prerogatives necessary to discharge his function as Guardian of the Cause, its Head and supreme protector. He is, furthermore, made the irremovable head and member for life of the supreme legislative body of the Faith. It is as the head of The Universal House of Justice, and as a member of that body, that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation. If the following passage, which gave rise to your query, is considered as referring to this last relationship, you will see that there is no contradiction between it and the other texts:

“Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s revealed utterances.”

Although the Guardian, in relation to his fellow members within The Universal House of Justice, cannot override the decision of the majority, it is inconceivable that the other members would ignore any objection he raised in the course of consultation or pass legislation contrary to what he expressed as being in harmony with the spirit of the Cause. It is, after all, the final act of judgment delivered by The Universal House of Justice that is vouchsafed infallibility, not any views expressed in the course of the process of enactment.

It can be seen, therefore, that there is no conflict between the Master’s statements concerning the unfailing divine guidance conferred upon The Universal House of Justice and the above passage from “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.”

It may help the friends to understand this relationship if they are aware of some of the processes that The Universal House of Justice follows when legislating. First, of course, it observes the greatest care in studying the Sacred Texts and the interpretations of the Guardian as well as considering the views of all the members. After long consultation the process of drafting a pronouncement is put into effect. During this process the whole matter may well be reconsidered. As a result of such reconsideration the final judgment may be significantly different from the conclusion earlier favored, or possibly it may be decided not to legislate at all on that subject at that time. One can understand how great would be the attention paid to the views of the Guardian during the above process were he alive.

In considering the second passage we must once more hold fast to the principle that the teachings do not contradict themselves.

Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of Guardians would endure forever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break in the line of Guardians is in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself:

The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After Him the decision rests with the Aghṣán [Branches], and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—so that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Bahá, who speak not without His leave and who pass no judgment but in accordance with that which God has ordained in this Tablet, they who are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth, so that they may spend them on that which has been decreed in the Holy Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.

The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for in this passage, in that the line of Aghṣán ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although, as is seen, the ending of the line of Aghṣán at some stage was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered. God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation." While 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms: "Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause!" "Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions." "The tests of every dispensation are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Cause, and as heretofore such a manifest Covenant, written by the Supreme Pen, hath not been entered upon, the tests are proportionately severe.... These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean, ... This foam of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disperse and vanish, while the ocean of the

Covenant shall eternally surge and roar.” And Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated: “The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God’s immutable Purpose for mankind in this day.” “... this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind.”

In the Bahá’í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that center which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá’u’lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is The Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centers and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to “Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” In the Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí (the Book of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In the Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh also ordains the institution of The Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of The Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: “Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to The Universal House of Justice,” and at the very end of the Will He says: “All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”

As the sphere of jurisdiction of The Universal House of Justice in matters of legislation extends to whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Sacred Text, it is clear that the Book itself is the highest authority and delimits the sphere of action of the House of Justice. Likewise, the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives of the Cause. The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to The Universal House of Justice as well as to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The fact that the Guardian has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of The Universal House of Justice does not carry with it the corollary that without such guidance The Universal House of Justice might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority; such a deduction would conflict with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian’s own clear assertion that The Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship. It should be remembered, however, that although National and Local Spiritual Assemblies can receive divine guidance if they consult in the manner and spirit described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, they do not share in the explicit guarantees of infallibility conferred upon The Universal House of Justice. Any careful student of the Cause can see with what care the Guardian, after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, guided these

elected representatives of the believers in the painstaking erection of the Administrative Order and in the formulation of Local and National Bahá'í Constitutions.

We hope that these elucidations will assist the friends in understanding these relationships more clearly, but we must all remember that we stand too close to the beginnings of the System ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be able fully to understand its potentialities or the interrelationships of its component parts. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 March 1930, "The contents of the Will of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed...."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

8 February 1970

To National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

For long centuries the African Continent, or rather that great part of it which lies south of the Sahara, remained relatively isolated from the rest of the world, untroubled and scarcely touched by the surging conflicts of the nations to the north and east. Now, rapidly emerging into the main stream of international interest, the African peoples, who were compared by Bahá'u'lláh to the black pupil of the eye through which "the light of the spirit shineth forth," are being swept by the heady enthusiasms of new-found independence, torn by the conflicting forces of divergent political interests, their vision obscured by the haze of materialism and the dust of nationalistic passions and age-old tribal rivalries.

In the midst of the storm and stress of the battles of selfish interests being waged about them, stand the followers of the Most Great Name, their sight attracted to the rising Sun of God's Holy Cause, their hearts welded together in a bond of true unity with all the children of men, and their voices raised in a universal song of praise to the Glory of God and the oneness of mankind, calling on their fellowmen to forget and forgo their differences and join them in obedience and service to God's Holy Command in this Day.

The Army of the Cause, advancing at the bidding of the Lord, to conquer the hearts of men, can never be defeated, but its rate of advance can be slowed down by acts of unwisdom and ignorance on the part of its supporters. We are writing you this letter to help in clarifying some of the issues that have, in the past, blurred the vision of some of the believers, and caused them to commit errors of judgment which have retarded the progress of the Faith in their countries.

One of these issues, and by far the most important, is a lack of appreciation of the implications of the Bahá'í principle of noninterference in political affairs. We find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have given us clear and convincing reasons why we must uphold this principle. These reasons are summarized below for the study and deepening of the friends. It is our hope that these observations will not only help the friends to intelligently and radiantly follow the holy teachings on this matter, but will help them to explain the Bahá'í attitude to those who may question its wisdom and usefulness:

The Faith of God is the sole source of salvation for mankind today. The true cause of the ills of humanity is its disunity. No matter how perfect may be the machinery devised by the leaders of men for the political unity of the world, it will still not provide the antidote to the poison sapping the vigor of present-day society. These ills can be cured only through the instrumentality of God's Faith. There are many well-wishers of mankind who devote their efforts to relief work and charity and to the

material well-being of man, but only Bahá'ís can do the work which God most wants done. When we devote ourselves to the work of the Faith we are doing a work which is the greatest aid and only refuge for a needy and divided world.

The Bahá'í Community is a worldwide organization seeking to establish true and universal peace on earth. If a Bahá'í works for one political party to overcome another it is a negation of the very spirit of the Faith. Membership in any political party, therefore, necessarily entails repudiation of some or all of the principles of peace and unity proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated: "Our party is God's party—we don't belong to any party."

If a Bahá'í were to insist on his right to support a certain political party, he could not deny the same degree of freedom to other believers. This would mean that within the ranks of the Faith, whose primary mission is to unite all men as one great family under God, there would be Bahá'ís opposed to each other. Where, then, would be the example of unity and harmony which the world is seeking?

If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in another country about the aims and purposes of the Faith. By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and wholeheartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Faith is not opposed to the true interests of any nation, nor is it against any party or faction. It holds aloof from all controversies and transcends them all, while enjoining upon its followers loyalty to government and a sane patriotism. This love for their country the Bahá'ís show by serving its well-being in their daily activity, or by working in the administrative channels of the government instead of through party politics or in diplomatic or political posts. The Bahá'ís may, indeed are encouraged to, mix with all strata of society, with the highest authorities and with leading personalities as well as with the mass of the people, and should bring the knowledge of the Faith to them; but in so doing they should strictly avoid becoming identified, or identifying the Faith, with political pursuits and party programs.

So vital is this principle of noninterference in political matters, which must govern the acts and words of Bahá'ís in every land, that Shoghi Effendi has written that "Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honors and rewards" would ever induce the true believers to deviate from this path, and that their words and conduct must proclaim that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh "are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke."

“Difficult and delicate though be our task,” he continues, “the sustaining power of Bahá’u’lláh and of His Divine guidance will assuredly assist us if we follow steadfastly in His way, and strive to uphold the integrity of His laws. The light of His redeeming grace, which no earthly power can obscure, will if we persevere, illuminate our path, as we steer our course amid the snares and pitfalls of a troubled age, and will enable us to discharge our duties in a manner that would redound to the glory and the honor of His blessed Name.”

The second issue which causes difficulties for the African friends in these days is the matter of tribalism. As Bahá’ís they are convinced that mankind is one and must be viewed as one entity, yet, as members of their respective tribes, they find themselves expected by their non-Bahá’í brothers to give their first loyalty to, and even aggressively pursue the interests of their tribe. They live, moreover, in an atmosphere which is only too often one of mistrust, fear and even hatred against the members of other tribes.

The Bahá’í attitude in such a situation is clearly set forth in the Writings. As Bahá’ís we are attached to our tribes and clans, just as we are to our families and, on a larger scale, to our nations, but we do not allow this attachment to conflict with our wider loyalty to humanity. The followers of the Faith, the Guardian has clearly stated, “will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the overriding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.”

In further elucidating this theme he has written: “Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the worldwide Law of Bahá’u’lláh.... It does not ignore nor does it attempt to suppress the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity ...”

In these days when tribal tensions are increasing in Africa the friends should be vigilant lest any trace of prejudice or hatred, God forbid, may enter their midst. On the contrary, they should endeavor to bring into the Faith an ever larger representation of the various tribes in each country, and through complete lack of prejudice as well as through the love that Bahá’ís have for each other and for their non-Bahá’í neighbors, demonstrate to their countrymen what the Word of God can do. They will thus provide, for the scrutiny of the leaders and rulers of their countries, a shining example of a unified community, working together in full concord and harmony, demonstrating a hope that is attainable, and a pattern worthy to be emulated.

To discriminate against any tribes because they are in a minority is a violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. As followers of God’s Holy Faith it is our obligation to protect the just interests of any minority element within the Bahá’í community. In fact in the administration of our Bahá’í affairs, representatives of minority groups are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are



even favored and accorded priority. Bahá'ís should be careful never to deviate from this noble standard, even if the course of events or public opinion should bring pressure to bear upon them.

The principles in the Writings are clear, but usually it is when these principles are applied that questions arise. In all cases where the correct course of action is not clear believers should consult their National Spiritual Assembly who will exercise their judgment in advising the friends on the best course to follow.

It is the hope and prayer of The Universal House of Justice that National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa will, in full collaboration with the Continental Boards of Counselors and Auxiliary Boards in their areas, act as loving shepherds to the divine flock in that mighty Continent, protect the friends from the evil influences surrounding them, guide them in the true and right path, and assist them to attain a continuously deeper understanding, a firmer conviction and a more consuming love for the Cause they are so devotedly seeking to promote and serve.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

6 March 1970

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have your letter of 14 January 1970 asking questions about the decision-making process of Spiritual Assemblies.

It is important to realize that the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies.

The ideal of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken. In the words of the beloved Guardian: "... when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be wholeheartedly enforced."

As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority.

When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting.

Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favor of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority, the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of "abstaining" does not arise in Bahá'í voting. A member who does not vote in favor of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at that moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Riḍván 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 RIḌVÁN 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 COUNSELORS THEIR AUXILIARY BOARDS TOGETHER WITH GROWING NEED AND EXPANSION WORLD COMMUNITY ANNOUNCE AUGMENTATION VITAL INSTITUTION THROUGH APPOINTMENT THREE ADDITIONAL COUNSELORS 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 RIḌVÁN 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 CENTER. URGENT IMMEDIATE VITAL NEED CONCENTRATE ATTENTION INCREASE NUMBER LOCALITIES LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES BELIEVERS FILL REMAINING PIONEER POSTS. LAST RIḌVÁN CALL RAISED SEVEN HUNDRED AND THIRTY-THREE PIONEERS MINIMUM REQUIREMENT. FOUR HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-NINE SPECIFIC POSTS STILL UNFILLED. TOTAL VICTORY REQUIRES MORE PIONEERS MORE FUNDS MORE NEW BELIEVERS. HANDS CAUSE COUNSELORS 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

August 1970

To the Continental Conference in La Paz, Bolivia, and the Oceanic Conference in Rose-Hill, Mauritius

Beloved Friends,

Our hearts turn with eager expectancy to the twin Conferences now in session in the southern hemisphere. Their convocation so shortly after the worldwide commemoration of the Centenary of the Martyrdom of the Purest Branch, calls to mind that the promotion and establishment of the Faith of God have always been through sacrifice and dedicated service. Indeed, these very Conferences testify to the creative power, the fruitfulness, the invocation of Divine confirmations which result from sacrificial service to the Cause of God. Although both Bolivia and Mauritius are mentioned specifically in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Cause, even thirty-five years ago, was virtually unknown in those areas; today we witness the holding of these historic Conferences.

Little wonder that South America, whose rulers and presidents were addressed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, of whose indigenous believers the Master, in those Tablets already referred to, wrote "should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world," should have exerted a magnetic attraction upon a number of ardent souls in the northern continent, eager to serve in so promising a field. A band of heroic pioneers, bearing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, gradually penetrated its wide territories, its jungles and mountains. They were followed by others under systematic crusades of two Seven Year Plans and the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Plan and together they became the spiritual conquerors of that continent. The Latin American communities which arose as a result of their pioneer efforts were described by the beloved Guardian as "associates in the execution" of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. May Maxwell, one of the great heroines of the Faith, attained her longed-for crown of martyrdom in Buenos Aires; Panama became the site of the sixth Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world, and La Paz, Bolivia, is now the scene of this Continental Conference.

The Indian Ocean, whose furthestmost waves lap the shores of the Cradle of our Faith, upon whose waters the Divine Báb traveled in the course of His pilgrimage to Mecca, the heart of Islam, where He openly announced His Mission; whose mighty subcontinent from which it derives its name was the home and assigned province of the ninth Letter of the Living; whose major islands were severally mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the seventh of His Tablets of the Divine Plan, lay, for most of a century, fallow to the Word of God, a challenge to the promotion of His Faith. This challenge was answered by half a hundred Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who, in response to the beloved Guardian's call left their homes and wholeheartedly gave themselves to the establishment of the Cause in those parts. They implanted the banner of Bahá'u'lláh upon its atolls, its great islands and bordering territories. Now, in the midmost heart of that huge expanse of sea, Mauritius, an island whose name was enshrined in Bahá'í history during the Heroic Age of our Faith as the

source, two years before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in America, of a contribution to the purchase of the site of the Mother Temple of the West, has been chosen as the venue of this oceanic Conference.

Not only have the institutions of the Faith been established in this ocean and this continent, but the spirit of the New Day, brilliant even at this early dawn with the light of Bahá'u'lláh's gifts to man, is apparent in the diversity of the attendants, in the brotherhood of erstwhile strangers—even enemies—and above all in the noble purposes for which you have gathered.

Your aim is the redemption of mankind from its godlessness, its ignorance, its confusion and conflict. You will succeed, as those before you succeeded, by sacrifice to the Cause of God. The deeds and services required of you now, will shine in the future, even as those of your spiritual predecessors shine today and will forever shine in the annals of the Cause.

We share with you the spiritual delight of these occasions and assure you of our constant and ardent prayers that your deliberations upon the objectives of the Cause in your areas and the spiritual fellowship which you will enjoy will result in immediate and determined plans to complete the tasks assigned to you ere the rapidly approaching end of the Nine Year Plan. This Plan is the current stage of the Master's Divine Plan and its success must precede those greater triumphs when, as the result of your labors, the divine outpourings will raise up a vast concourse of radiant and devoted servants of Bahá'u'lláh who will establish His Kingdom in this world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

January 1971

To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference in Monrovia, Liberia

Dearly loved Friends,

The emergence on the African Continent of a widely spread, numerous, diversified and united Bahá'í community, so swiftly after the initiation of organized teaching plans there, is of the utmost significance and a signal evidence of the bounties which God has destined for its peoples in this day.

The great victories in Africa, which brought such joy to the Guardian's heart in the last years of his life, resulted from the self-sacrificing devotion of a handful of pioneers, gradually assisted by the first few native believers, all laboring under the loving shadow of the Hand of the Cause Músá Banání. From their efforts there has been raised up an increasing army of African teachers, administrators, pioneers and valiant promoters of the Divine Cause, whose main task is to bring to all Africa the bounties conferred by the Word of God, bounties of enlightenment, zeal, devotion and eventually the true civilization of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.

Many of the gravest ills now afflicting the human race appear in acute form on the African Continent. Racial, tribal and religious prejudice, disunity of nations, the scourge of political factionalism, poverty and lack of education are obvious examples. Bahá'ís have a great part to play—greater than they may realize—in the healing of these sicknesses and the abatement of their worst effects. By their radiant unity, by their “bright and shining” faces, their self-discipline in zealously following all the requirements of Bahá'í law, their abstention from politics, their constant study and proclamation of the Great Message, they will hasten the advent of that glorious day when all mankind will know its true brotherhood and will bask in the sunshine of God's love and blessing.

That the African believers are fully capable of taking their full share in building the Kingdom of God on earth, their natural abilities and present deeds have fully demonstrated. An African Hand of the Cause of God, even now in the course of a brilliant, triumphal teaching tour of the planet, African Counselors, Board members, national and local administrators and an ever-increasing army of believers testify to the vigor and immense capacity of this highly blessed continent to serve its Lord in the great day of His appearance. That the African believers, so beloved by the Guardian of the Faith, will rise to the challenge facing them and earn the gratitude and goodwill of all mankind by their deeds of dedication and self-sacrifice is the longing of our hearts.

May this Conference become a sun from which will stream forth to all parts of the vast continent rays of spiritual energy and inspiration, galvanizing the friends to action in the fields of teaching and pioneering in such manner that they will rapidly achieve all the tasks assigned to them under the Nine Year Plan.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

January 1971

To the Friends of God assembled in the Oceanic Conference in Singapore, Malaysia

Dearly loved Friends,

The wonderful progress made by the Bahá'í communities of South East Asia towards achievement of the tasks assigned to them under the Nine Year Plan fills our hearts with thankfulness to God and arouses our keenest admiration for the capacities and dedicated services of the friends in all those vast and varied territories. Indeed, so bountiful have been the divine confirmations rewarding their efforts that we are confident of their ability to far exceed the stated objectives and to initiate the opening phase of the next stage of their development, a massive increase in the establishment of the Cause of God among the teeming millions of the islands and ocean-bordering countries of so huge an area of the earth.

South East Asia, whose gifted and industrious peoples have embraced four of the world's major religions, have produced in all ages civilizations and cultures representative of the highest accomplishments of the human race, now experiencing with the rest of the world the disruptive, revolutionizing, "vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order ... the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed," lies open and receptive to the Word of God, ready once more to nourish in its fertile soil that potent seed and to bring forth, in its own characteristic manner and as an integral part of the world civilization, the institutions, the fabric, the brilliant edifice of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.

We now summon the believers of this highly promising area, flushed with the tide of approaching victory, to launch a three-pronged campaign, the main feature of which is to achieve an immediate expansion of the Faith, exceeding the aims of the Nine Year Plan. In addition you are called upon to raise a corps of traveling teachers, whose main objective will be to visit all the communities and groups in the area for the purpose of deepening and consolidating their Bahá'í life, thus preserving the victories won and reinforcing the base for future development. Simultaneously a number of Chinese-speaking believers must arise who, as pioneers and traveling teachers in all the countries of South East Asia, will attract large numbers of the talented Chinese race to embrace and serve the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Recognizing your current achievements and fully confident in your determination and ability to continue to attract the divine confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, we are happy to announce as a supplementary goal of the Nine Year Plan, the establishment, at Riqdán, 1972, of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Singapore, an additional supporting pillar of The Universal House of Justice and a new bastion of the Faith in so vital a cross-roads of human activity.



We pray that your deliberations will engender a new wave of enthusiasm, cement ever more firmly the bonds of love between the many and various national communities of your area and result in practical plans for the implementation of the above tasks.

We send you all our most loving greetings and look forward eagerly to the report of your conference.

[signed: 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 Center 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 centers in 35 countries in 1921, to over 46,000 centers 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 Riḍván 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 Riḍván 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 Riḍván 1972 will take part in the election of The Universal House of Justice at Riḍván 1973, when an international convention will be held at the World Center.

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 Riḍván.

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 traveling 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 worldwide 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 splendor 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 traveling 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 Center, 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

May 1971

To the Friends of God gathered in the Caribbean Conference

Warmest greetings!

How propitious that on its mountaintop between the two greatest oceans and the two American continents the Mother Temple of Latin America is rising now in Panama, a land blessed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy that "in the future it will gain most great importance." How splendid that the vision projected in the Divine Plan for the Americas has sprung into such vibrant life in this Caribbean basin, in country after country upon its verdant shores, in island after island across its expanse, all named by the Master in His Tablets. What shall we not witness ere long in these places so charged with destiny through the Master's utterances!

The Nine Year Plan, the current stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is approaching its triumphant end. This Conference is an occasion to sum up what has been won, to determine to achieve the remaining goals for expansion in these blessed lands, and to consolidate the old and new communities of the Most Great Name. Indeed, the winning of our grand Bahá'í objectives began just yesterday when, in the early years of the Formative Age, a few travelers crossed the Caribbean. Yet it was not until the successive Plans of the beloved Guardian, culminating in the Ten Year Crusade, when 27 Knights of Bahá'u'lláh settled throughout this vast area, that the Cause took firm root. By 1963 the countries and islands of the Caribbean claimed less than 400 localities and only 147 Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now Bahá'ís are to be found in over 2500 localities, more than 500 Local Assemblies and 16 National Spiritual Assemblies have been formed, and there have been hundreds of concrete achievements which have brought about our recognition as an independent Faith.

The Americas have been a melting pot and a meeting place for the races of men, and the need is acute for the fulfillment of God's promises of the realization of the oneness of mankind. Particularly do the Master and the Guardian point to the Afro-Americans and the Amerindians, two great ethnic groups whose spiritual powers will be released through their response to the Creative Word. But our Teachings must touch all, must include all peoples. And, in this hour of your tireless activity, what special rewards shall come to those who will arise, summoned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Words: "Now is the time for you to divest yourselves of the garment of attachment to this world that perisheth, to be wholly severed from the physical world, become heavenly angels, and travel to these countries."

The time is short, the needs many. No effort can be foregone, no opportunity wasted. Praised be God that you have gathered in this Conference to consult upon the vital requirements of this highly significant moment. Our prayers ascend at the Holy Threshold that every session of this historic meeting will attract

Divine Blessings, and that each soul, armed with the love of God and imbued with His purpose for a struggling mankind, will arise to activate, beyond all present hopes, the vast spiritual potentialities of the Americas.

To each of you we send our deepest love.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

May 1971

To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference of the South Pacific Ocean

Dearly loved Friends,

We send our warmest greetings and deepest love on the occasion of the first Conference in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Praise be to God that you have gathered to consult on the vital needs of the hour!

Recalling the promise of Bahá'u'lláh "Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and, raising His voice, proclaim: 'I am the lifegiver of the world!'" we now witness its fulfillment in the vast area of the Pacific Ocean, in island after island mentioned by the Master in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. How great is the potential for the Faith in localities blessed by these references!

At the inception of the Formative Age, the Cause was little known here. Agnes Alexander had brought the Teachings to the Hawaiian Islands. Father and Mother Dunn had only recently arrived in Australia. Later the name of Martha Root was to be emblazoned across the Pacific. Still later, at the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade, a vanguard of twenty-one Knights of Bahá'u'lláh raised His call as they settled in the islands of this great Ocean. The names of these valiant souls, together with the names of the army of pioneers and teachers who followed, will be forever enshrined in the annals of the Faith.

Their mighty endeavors brought about the enrollment of thousands of the peoples of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia under the banner of the Most Great Name, the opening in Australasia of more than 800 centers and the establishment of ten pillars of The Universal House of Justice. We can but marvel at such triumphs attained despite great difficulties imposed by the vast expanse of ocean separating the island communities, especially when it is recalled that in many of these islands even the Christian Gospel was unknown as late as the 1830s.

How great is the responsibility to continue spreading the Word of God throughout the Pacific. It was in the Tablets of the Divine Plan that 'Abdu'l-Bahá called for teachers "speaking their languages, severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God," to "turn their faces to and travel through the three great Island groups of the Pacific Ocean—Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia ... With hearts overflowing with the love of God, with tongues commemorating the mention of God" to "deliver the Glad Tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts to all the people."

The Nine Year Plan, the current phase of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, is now approaching its final stages. It is incumbent on the friends to assess what has been accomplished and to anticipate and plan for

such rapid acceleration of the teaching and consolidation work as is necessary to win all goals by 1973. Time is short; the needs critical. No effort must be spared; no opportunity overlooked.

Our prayers ascend at the Holy Threshold that every session of this historic meeting will attract Divine blessings, and that the friends will go forth, armed with the love of God and enthusiasm born of the Spirit, fully prepared to scale the heights of victory!

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



12 July 1971

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have noted with deep satisfaction that some National Spiritual Assemblies have already initiated plans to befittingly commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the inception of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

We feel it would be highly fitting for the three days, November 26 to 28, during which the Day of the Covenant and the Anniversary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá occur, to be set aside this year by all National Spiritual Assemblies for specially arranged gatherings and conferences, convened either nationally or locally or both, on the three following main themes: The Bahá'í Covenant, The Formative Age, and The Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

We hope that these gatherings will serve to intensify the consecration of the workers in the Divine Vineyard in every land, and provide them with the opportunity, especially in the watches of the night of that Ascension, when they will be commemorating the passing hour of our Beloved Master, to renew their pledge to Bahá'u'lláh and to rededicate themselves to the accomplishment of the as yet unfulfilled goals of the Nine Year Plan.

The Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land, the members of The Universal House of Justice, and all resident and visiting believers at the World Center will, on that memory-laden night, visit the Shrine of that Mystery of God on behalf of the entire Community of the Blessed Beauty and will supplicate for the stalwart champions of the Faith laboring in the forefront of so many fields of service and winning fresh triumphs in His Name, for the self-sacrificing believers without whose support and sustained assistance most of these victories could not be achieved, and for those who will be inspired to join the ranks of the active and dedicated promoters of His glorious Cause at this crucial stage in the development of the Plan, that we may all meet our obligations and discharge our sacred trust, thus making it possible in the latter months of the Plan for our entire resources to be devoted to an even greater expansion of the Faith in its onward march towards the spiritual conquest of the planet.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

September 1971

To the Friends assembled in the North Atlantic Conference in Reykjavik

Dearly loved Friends,

To each and every one of you in this historic Conference we send our most cordial and loving greetings. The famous island in which you are now gathered, so strategically placed between the two great continents flanking the vast oceanic area which surrounds it, to which the Teachings of Christ were brought a millennium ago, and which, in this Dispensation, was mentioned by the Center of the Covenant in His Tablets of the Divine Plan, first heard the Name of Bahá'u'lláh in 1924 when the Hand of the Cause Amelia Collins stopped briefly in Reykjavik and made the acquaintance of Hólmfríður Árnadóttir who subsequently became the first Bahá'í of Iceland. Eleven years later the beloved Martha Root spent a month in this land which she loved so well. On that occasion, with the help of Hólmfríður, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was widely proclaimed in the press, on the radio and from the lecture platform.

The great Ocean extending from the equator to the Pole and from Europe to North America, which has been both the barrier and the link between the Old and the New Worlds, has played a highly significant part in the later history of mankind. Long before Columbus arrived in the West Indies the Vikings, forebears of Icelanders of today, were plying its northern waters. In later centuries wave upon wave of Europeans sailed from east to west, engaging in one of the most significant migrations in human history. In the twentieth century 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself sailed across it and back, a voyage unique in the religious history of mankind and creating a remarkable parallel with the Light of the Cause itself, beaming from the East across the great Ocean to the heart of the North American Continent, being reflected back again, firing new beacon lights in Europe and in later years diffusing its radiance throughout the world. The great Republic whose eastern shore forms part of the boundary of this Ocean has become the Cradle of the Administrative Order and at this present time the banner of the Most Great Name is being raised in island after island of this Ocean, two of which—Iceland and Ireland—will raise, next Riḍván, new pillars of The Universal House of Justice.

The Faith of God is flourishing in the lands around the North Atlantic; a new wind is blowing, promoting an upsurge of proclamation and teaching. In Europe the youth are afire with enthusiasm and vigor. In Canada and the United States a ground swell of unknown proportions is carrying Bahá'í communities to heights of unprecedented achievement.

You are gathered in this Conference to consult on ways and means of winning, in the few fleeting months ahead, the remaining goals of the Nine Year Plan. In Europe particularly there is much to be done, but we have full faith that the friends, galvanized by their love for Bahá'u'lláh and fortified by His promises of

Divine assistance, will, with the enthusiasm which they already display, commit their resources to the tasks ahead and will surely attain the victory.

The beloved Master prayed that holy souls would arise from the Northern Territories of the West and become signs of God's guidance and standards of the Supreme Concourse. In one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan He refers to an inhospitable island of that area saying:

Should the fire of the love of God be kindled in Greenland, all the ice of that country will be melted, and its cold weather become temperate—that is, 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. Effort, the utmost effort is required....

As the friends gathered in Reykjavik and Sapporo bring this worldwide series of Oceanic and Continental Conferences to a triumphant close our thoughts are with you and our prayers on your behalf rise from the Sacred Threshold. May untold blessings and confirmations be showered upon you as you go forth to labor for the advancement of the Cause of God and may your brows be crowned with victory.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

September 1971

To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference of the North Pacific Ocean

Dearly loved Friends,

On the eve of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the Formative Age of our Faith we call to mind the high hopes often expressed by the beloved Master for the spread of the Cause in this region, His mention in the Tablets of the Divine Plan of many of the territories represented in this Conference, and the faithful and devoted services of that maidservant of Bahá'u'lláh, the Hand of the Cause Agnes Alexander, who brought the Teachings to these shores in the early years of this century.

In these days we are witnessing an unprecedented acceleration of the teaching work in almost every part of the globe. In the North Pacific Ocean area great strides have been made in the advancement of the Cause since that historic Asia Regional Teaching Conference in Nikko just sixteen years ago. The next two years witnessed the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska and of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia. To the Convention in Tokyo at Riḍván 1957 the Guardian addressed these prophetic words:

This auspicious event, which posterity will regard as the culmination of a process initiated, half a century ago, in the capital city of Japan, ... marks the opening of the second chapter in the history of the evolution of His Faith in the North Pacific area. Such a consummation cannot fail to lend a tremendous impetus to its onward march in the entire Pacific Ocean ...

Since that time National Spiritual Assemblies have also been firmly established in Korea and Taiwan.

Hokkaido, the site of this Conference, first heard of the Teachings less than fifteen years ago, and the first aboriginal peoples of this land accepted Bahá'u'lláh just over a decade ago. Now you are the witnesses to the beginnings of a rapid increase in the number of believers. Peoples in other islands and lands of the North Pacific, including the Ryukyus, Guam, the Trust Territories, the western shores of Canada and Alaska and the Aleutians are also enrolling under the banner of the Most Great Name, and next Riḍván yet another pillar of The Universal House of Justice is to be raised in Micronesia. We are heartened at the prospect that from the indigenous peoples of this vast oceanic area—the Ainu, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Okinawans, the Micronesians, the American Indians, the Eskimos, and the Aleuts—vast numbers will soon enter the Faith.

The final hours of the Nine Year Plan are fast fleeting. Praise be to God that you have gathered to consult on ways and means of assuring complete victory so that from these outposts the Teachings may spread to

those nearby lands where teeming millions have not as yet heard of the advent of this Most Great Dispensation.

The sweet perfume of victory is in the air, and we must hasten to achieve it while there is yet time. Vital goals, particularly on the homefronts of Taiwan and Japan, remain to be won, and everywhere the roots of the faith of the believers must sink deeper and deeper into the firm earth of the Teachings lest tempests and trials as yet unforeseen shake or uproot the tender plants so lovingly raised in the islands of this great Ocean and the lands surrounding it.

As you and the friends in the sister Conference in Reykjavik bring this series of eight Oceanic and Continental Conferences to a triumphant close, our prayers for the success of your deliberations ascend at the Holy Threshold. May God grant you the resources, the strength, and the determination to attain your highest hopes, and enable you to open a new and glorious chapter in the evolution of His Faith in the North Pacific area.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: 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 Khánum representing The Universal House of Justice, Ugo Giachery and Zikrullah 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 Riḍván 1973. It is expected that a large number of new Local Spiritual Assemblies will be established at Riḍván and immediately after 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 traveling 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 Counselors and the work of their Auxiliary Boards must develop and spread through the entire fabric of the Bahá'í community. A vast systematic program 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

24 April 1972

To the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

Recently we have received queries from several sources about the nature of the Institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors and its relationship to the Institution of the Hands of the Cause, and we feel it is timely for us to give further elucidation.

As with so many aspects of the Administrative Order, understanding of this subject will develop and clarify with the passage of time as that Order grows organically in response to the power and guidance of Almighty God and in accordance with the needs of a rapidly developing worldwide community. However, certain aspects are already so clear as to require a proper understanding by the friends.

In the Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí (the Book of His Covenant) Bahá’u’lláh wrote “Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá,” and referring to this very passage the beloved Guardian wrote on 4 November 1931:

In this holy cycle the “learned” are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to the “rulers” they refer to the members of the Local, National and International Houses of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future.

(Translated from the Persian)

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counselors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards fall within the definition of the “learned” given by the beloved Guardian. Thus they are all intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to the three ranks collectively as one institution.

However, each is also a separate institution in itself. The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God was brought into existence in the time of Bahá’u’lláh and when the Administrative Order was proclaimed and formally established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will, it became an auxiliary institution of the Guardianship. The Auxiliary Boards, in their turn, were brought into being by Shoghi Effendi as an auxiliary institution of the Hands of the Cause.

When, following the passing of Shoghi Effendi, The Universal House of Justice decided that it could not legislate to make possible the appointment of further Hands of the Cause, it became necessary for it to



create a new institution, appointed by itself, to extend into the future the functions of protection and propagation vested in the Hands of the Cause and, with that in view, so to develop the Institution of the Hands that it could nurture the new institution and function in close collaboration with it as long as possible. It was also vital so to arrange matters as to make the most effective use of the unique services of the Hands themselves.

The first step in this development was taken in November 1964 when The Universal House of Justice formally related the Institution of the Hands to itself by stating that "Responsibility for decisions on matters of general policy affecting the institution of the Hands of the Cause, which was formerly exercised by the beloved Guardian, now devolves upon The Universal House of Justice as the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn." At that time the number of members of the Auxiliary Boards was increased from 72 to 135, and the Hands of the Cause in each continent were called upon to appoint one or more members of their Auxiliary Boards to act in an executive capacity on behalf of and in the name of each Hand, thereby assisting him in carrying out his work.

In June 1968 the Institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors was brought into being, fulfilling the goal of extending the aforementioned functions of the Hands into the future, and this momentous decision was accompanied by the next step in the development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause: the continental Hands were to serve henceforth on a worldwide basis and operate individually in direct relationship to The Universal House of Justice; the Hands ceased to be responsible for the direction of the Auxiliary Boards, which became an auxiliary institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors; the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land were given the task of acting as liaison between The Universal House of Justice and the Boards of Counselors; and the working interrelationships between the Hands and the Boards of Counselors were established. Reference was also made to the future establishment by The Universal House of Justice, with the assistance of the Hands residing in the Holy Land, of an international teaching center in the Holy Land.

In July 1969 and at Ridván 1970 further increases in the numbers of Counselors and Auxiliary Board members were made.

Other developments in the Institution of the Hands of the Cause and the Institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors will no doubt take place in future as the international teaching center comes into being and as the work of the Counselors expands.

We have noted that the Hands, the Counselors and the Auxiliary Boards are sometimes referred to by the friends as the "appointive arm" of the Administrative Order in contradistinction to The Universal House of Justice and the National and Local Assemblies which constitute the "elective arm." While there is truth in this description as it applies to the method used in the creation of these institutions, the friends should understand that it is not only the fact of appointment that particularly distinguishes the institutions of the Hands, Counselors and Auxiliary Boards. There are, for instance, many more believers appointed to committees in the "elective arm" than are serving in the so-called "appointive arm." A more striking

distinction is that whereas the “rulers” in the Cause function as corporate bodies, the “learned” operate primarily as individuals.

In a letter written on 14 March 1927 to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian's Secretary explained, on his behalf, the principle in the Cause of action by majority vote. He pointed out how, in the past, it was certain individuals who “accounted themselves as superior in knowledge and elevated in position” who caused division, and that it was those “who pretended to be the most distinguished of all” who “always proved themselves to be the source of contention.” “But praise be to God,” he continued, “that the Pen of Glory has done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among men and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centers and specified Assemblies. Even so, no Assembly has been invested with the absolute authority to deal with such general matters as affect the interests of nations. Nay rather, He has brought all the assemblies together under the shadow of one House of Justice, one divinely appointed Center, so that there would be only one Center and all the rest integrated into a single body, revolving around one expressly designated Pivot, thus making them all proof against schism and division.” (Translated from the Persian.)

Having permanently excluded the evils admittedly inherent in the institutions of the “learned” in past dispensations, Bahá'u'lláh has nevertheless embodied in His Administrative Order the beneficent elements which exist in such institutions, elements which are of fundamental value for the progress of the Cause, as can be gauged from even a cursory reading of the Guardian's message of 4 June 1957.

The existence of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who play such a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá'í administration unparalleled in the religions of the past. The newness and uniqueness of this concept make it difficult to grasp; only as the Bahá'í Community grows and the believers are increasingly able to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts from past ages, will the vital interdependence of the “rulers” and “learned” in the Faith be properly understood, and the inestimable value of their interaction be fully recognized.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

7 June 1972

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

JOYFULLY INFORM BAHÁ'Í WORLD RANGE AND ACCELERATION GROWTH CAUSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH  
LOCAL NATIONAL LEVELS AND RESULTANT EXPANSION ACTIVITIES WORLD CENTER IMPEL US  
NOW ANNOUNCE ERE COMPLETION NINE YEAR PLAN DECISION INITIATE PROCEDURE SELECT  
ARCHITECT DESIGN BUILDING FOR SEAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE ENVISAGED BELOVED  
GUARDIAN ON FAR FLUNG ARC HEART MOUNT CARMEL CENTERING SPOT CONSECRATED  
RESTING PLACES SISTER BROTHER MOTHER BELOVED MASTER. CONSTRUCTION THIS CENTER  
LEGISLATION GOD'S WORLD-REDEEMING ORDER WILL CONSTITUTE FIRST MAJOR STEP  
DEVELOPMENT AREA SURROUNDING HOLY SHRINE SINCE COMPLETION INTERNATIONAL  
ARCHIVES BUILDING. MOVED PAY TRIBUTE EXPRESS HEARTFELT GRATITUDE OUTSTANDING  
SERVICES ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN IN PREPARATION FOR THIS HISTORIC UNDERTAKING.  
FERVENTLY PRAYING PROJECT NOW INITIATED MAY DURING YEARS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD  
PROGRESS UNINTERRUPTEDLY SPEEDILY ATTAIN MAJESTIC CONSUMMATION.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

13 July 1972

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The blessings of the Ancient Beauty are being showered upon the followers of the Greatest Name. Our efforts to serve Him and humanity are being crowned with victories throughout the world. As we give thanks for these splendid achievements, as the Cause of God spreads in every land, as our institutions become more perfected, as the number of believers increases over the face of the planet, our individual lives must increasingly mirror forth each day the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and we must so live our lives that all will see in us a different people. The acts we perform, the attitudes we manifest, the very words we speak should be an attraction, a magnet, drawing the sincere to the Divine Teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh tells us that prejudice in its various forms destroys the edifice of humanity. We are adjured by the Divine Messenger to eliminate all forms of prejudice from our lives. Our outer lives must show forth our beliefs. The world must see that, regardless of each passing whim or current fashion of the generality of mankind, the Bahá'í lives his life according to the tenets of his Faith. We must not allow the fear of rejection by our friends and neighbors to deter us from our goal: to live the Bahá'í life. Let us strive to blot out from our lives every last trace of prejudice—racial, religious, political, economic, national, tribal, class, cultural, and that which is based on differences of education or age. We shall be distinguished from our non-Bahá'í associates if our lives are adorned with this principle.

If we allow prejudice of any kind to manifest itself in us, we shall be guilty before God of causing a setback to the progress and real growth of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It is incumbent upon every believer to endeavor with a fierce determination to eliminate this defect from his thoughts and acts. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to inculcate this principle in the hearts of the friends through every means at their disposal including summer schools, conferences, institutes and study classes.

The fundamental purpose of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is the realization of the organic unity of the entire human race. Bearing this glorious destiny in mind, and with entire reliance on the promises of the Blessed Beauty, we should follow His exhortation:

We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

30 July 1972

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bolivia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In reply to your letter of July 4th asking guidance as to what is a functioning Local Spiritual Assembly, we offer you the following comments:

Local Spiritual Assemblies are at the present newly born institutions, struggling for the most part to establish themselves both in the Bahá'í community and in the world. They are as yet only embryos of the majestic institutions ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings. This is also true of National Spiritual Assemblies. In the following passage written by the Secretary of the Guardian on his behalf this point is elucidated:

The Bahá'í Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only just beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful—how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings.

(From letter dated 14 October 1941 to two believers)

What we find expounded in the writings of our Faith is the lofty station Local Spiritual Assemblies must attain in their gradual and at times painful development. In encouraging these Assemblies to attain this aim, there is no harm in the National Spiritual Assembly mentioning certain minimum requirements from time to time, provided it is clear that nonattainment of such standards, which by their very nature must be continuously revised with changing conditions, do not justify the withdrawal of recognition from any weak Assemblies. It would not be profitable therefore for The Universal House of Justice to lay down universal minimum standards for properly functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies, as these must necessarily differ from country to country, and even from district to district within the same country, in the process of the evolution of these Assemblies into Houses of Justice, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously

invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

In its own meetings it must endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá'í consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh. It should hold regular meetings and ensure that all its members are currently informed of the activities of the Assembly, that its secretary carries out his duties, and its treasurer holds and disburses the funds of the Faith to its satisfaction, keeping proper accounts and issuing receipts for all contributions. Many Assemblies find that some of their activities such as teaching, observance of Feasts and anniversaries, solution of personal problems, and other duties are best dealt with by committees appointed by the Assembly and responsible to it.

In all cases submitted for its consideration the Assembly must uphold the standard of justice in delivering its verdict, and in all its dealings with the community and the outside world it must strive to evince the qualities of leadership. The following quotation from a letter of the Guardian summarizes in simple terms the immediate goal every Assembly should set for itself in its efforts to pursue the exalted standard of perfection inculcated in our writings:

The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work where they could use their energy.

Shoghi Effendi hopes that the Assemblies will do their utmost in planning such teaching activities and that every single soul will be kept busy.

(From letter dated 30 August 1930  
written on behalf of the Guardian to the  
National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

In the compilation of texts we sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies in August 1970, and in the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, you will find all the objectives Local Spiritual Assemblies must aim at achieving in their process of growth and development. We recommend that you restudy these documents carefully and discuss this highly important problem with the Counselors of your zone, who will be only too glad to help you encourage the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies in your country.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

26 November 1972

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The following cable has just been sent to the United States Bahá'í News for publication.

WITH GRATEFUL JOYOUS HEARTS ANNOUNCE ENTIRE BAHÁ'Í WORLD ADOPTION PROFOUNDLY  
SIGNIFICANT STEP IN UNFOLDMENT MISSION SUPREME ORGAN BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMONWEALTH  
THROUGH FORMULATION CONSTITUTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE. AFTER OFFERING HUMBLE  
PRAYERS GRATITUDE ON DAY COVENANT AT THREE SACRED THRESHOLDS BAHJÍ HAIFA MEMBERS  
GATHERED COUNCIL CHAMBER PRECINCTS HOUSE BLESSED MASTER APPENDED THEIR SIGNATURES  
FIXED SEAL ON INSTRUMENT ENVISAGED WRITINGS BELOVED GUARDIAN HAILED BY HIM AS MOST  
GREAT LAW FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. FULLY ASSURED MEASURE JUST TAKEN WILL FURTHER REINFORCE  
TIES BINDING WORLD CENTER TO NATIONAL LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT WORLD RELEASE  
FRESH ENERGIES INCREASE ENTHUSIASM CONFIDENCE VALIANT WORKERS HIS DIVINE VINEYARD  
LABORING ASSIDUOUSLY BRING MANKIND UNDER SHELTER HIS ALL-GLORIOUS COVENANT.

Please share this joyous news with the friends. It is anticipated that the Constitution will be published at  
Riḍván.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



15 March 1973

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

OCCASION NAW-RÚZ 130 JOYOUSLY ANNOUNCE BAHÁ'Í WORLD ACQUISITION BY PURCHASE MANSION MAZRA'IH RESULT SEVERAL YEARS PATIENT PERSISTENT DETERMINED NEGOTIATIONS THEREBY ADDING TO BAHÁ'Í ENDOWMENTS HOLY LAND FIRST RESIDENCE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AFTER NINE YEARS SPENT WALLED PRISON CITY 'AKKÁ. CONTROL THIS HOLY SITE REACQUIRED BY BELOVED GUARDIAN AFTER LAPSE MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS WHEN HE SECURED LEASE MANSION 1950 EXTENDED TO PRESENT TIME. PURCHASE INCLUDES LAND AREA APPROXIMATING TWENTY-FOUR THOUSAND SQUARE METERS HIGHLY SUITABLE EXTENSION GARDENS CULTIVATION. OFFERING PRAYER THANKSGIVING SACRED THRESHOLD THIS GREATLY CHERISHED BOUNTY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 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 labor, 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 Ḥaḏíratu'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 favorable 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 Center 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 labors of a special committee appointed by the Persian National Spiritual Assembly. The material at the World Center, 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 Riḍván.

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 worldwide 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 centered 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 program. 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 nongovernmental 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 the 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 Counselors, 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 Counselors, 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 Program 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 traveling teachers, the raising of *Mashriqu'l-Adhikárs* and acquisition of Bahá'í properties, the purchase of Holy Places in the Cradle of the Faith and at the World Center, 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 *Ḥuququ'lláh* has been strengthened in preparation for its extension to other parts of the world. An International Deputization Fund was established at the World Center to assist pioneers and traveling 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 endeavor 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 practice 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 Tehran, 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 meters 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

7 May 1973

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is now possible to share with you all the news of an event which crowns the victories with which Bahá'u'lláh has blessed His followers during the Nine Year Plan, an event of which the true significance will be fully understood only in the course of centuries to come: a reigning monarch has accepted the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among those to whom *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh* was presented in 1967 was His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II, the Head of State of the independent nation of Western Samoa in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. His Highness, who had already heard of the Faith, showed immediately that the sacred Words had touched his heart, and The Universal House of Justice thereupon asked the Hand of the Cause Dr. Ugo Giachery, who had presented the book to him, to return to Western Samoa for further audiences with His Highness. Following this visit the Malietoa conveyed his acceptance of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to The Universal House of Justice and became the first reigning sovereign to enter beneath the shade of this Cause.

His Highness decided, with the full agreement of The Universal House of Justice, that it was not propitious to make his declaration public at that time. He has been visited from time to time by Hands of the Cause and other believers, and continual touch with His Highness has been maintained by the House of Justice through Mr. Suhayl 'Alá'í, a member of the Continental Board of Counselors for Australasia. Gradually the Malietoa has let it be known to those around him that he has accepted Bahá'u'lláh. Now he has judged the time ripe to share this wondrous news with his fellow-believers in all parts of the world, by addressing to the International Bahá'í Convention the gracious and inspiring message of which a copy is enclosed with this letter...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

5 June 1973

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

ANNOUNCE ESTABLISHMENT HOLY LAND LONG ANTICIPATED INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER DESTINED EVOLVE INTO ONE THOSE WORLD-SHAKING WORLD-EMBRACING WORLD-DIRECTING ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS ORDAINED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ANTICIPATED BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ELUCIDATED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI. MEMBERSHIP THIS NASCENT INSTITUTION COMPRISES ALL HANDS CAUSE GOD AND INITIALLY THREE COUNSELORS WHO WITH HANDS PRESENT HOLY LAND WILL CONSTITUTE NUCLEUS ITS VITAL OPERATIONS. CALLING UPON HOOPER DUNBAR FLORENCE MAYBERRY 'AZÍZ YAZDÍ PROCEED HOLY LAND ASSUME THIS HIGHLY MERITORIOUS SERVICE. OFFERING PRAYERS HEARTFELT GRATITUDE SACRED THRESHOLD THIS FURTHER EVIDENCE ORGANIC EVOLUTION ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



8 June 1973

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The centennial year of the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has already witnessed events of such capital significance in the annals of the Bahá'í Dispensation as to cause us to contemplate with awe the rapidity with which Divine Providence is advancing the Cause of the Most Great Name. The time is indeed propitious for the establishment of the International Teaching Centre, a development which, at one and the same time, brings to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land and provides for its extension into the future, links the institution of the Boards of Counselors even more intimately with that of the Hands of the Cause of God, and powerfully reinforces the discharge of the rapidly growing responsibilities of The Universal House of Justice.

This International Teaching Centre now established will, in due course, operate from that building designated by the Guardian as the Seat for the Hands of the Cause, which must be raised on the arc on Mount Carmel in close proximity to the Seat of The Universal House of Justice.

The duties now assigned to this nascent institution are:

- To coordinate, stimulate and direct the activities of the Continental Boards of Counselors and to act as liaison between them and The Universal House of Justice.
- To be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and to be able, from the background of this knowledge, to make reports and recommendations to The Universal House of Justice and give advice to the Continental Boards of Counselors.
- To be alert to possibilities, both within and without the Bahá'í community, for the extension of the teaching work into receptive or needy areas, and to draw the attention of The Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counselors to such possibilities, making recommendations for action.
- To determine and anticipate needs for literature, pioneers and traveling teachers and to work out teaching plans, both regional and global, for the approval of The Universal House of Justice.

All the Hands of the Cause of God will be members of the International Teaching Centre. Each Hand will be kept regularly informed of the activities of the Center through reports or copies of its minutes, and will be able, wherever he may be residing or traveling, to convey suggestions, recommendations and information to the Center and, whenever he is in the Holy Land, to take part in the consultations and other activities of the Center.

In addition, we now appoint Mr. Hooper Dunbar, Mrs. Florence Mayberry and Mr. 'Aziz Yazdí to membership of the International Teaching Centre, with the rank of Counselor. These believers, who have been serving with distinction on the Continental Boards of Counselors in South America, North America and Central and East Africa respectively, will henceforth reside in Haifa and will, together with the Hands present in the Holy Land, constitute the nucleus of the operations of the Center.

Authority for the expulsion and reinstatement of Covenant-breakers remains with the Hands of the Cause of God. All such matters will be investigated locally by the relative Continental Board of Counselors in consultation with any Hand or Hands who may be in the area. The Continental Board of Counselors and the Hands concerned will then make their reports to the International Teaching Centre where they will be considered. The decision whether or not to expel or reinstate will be made by the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land who will, as at present, submit their decision to The Universal House of Justice for approval.

The following changes to the zones of the Continental Boards of Counselors are now made:

- The number of zones has been raised to twelve by the removal of India, Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Laccadive, Maldivé, Andaman and Nicobar Islands from Central Asia.
- The Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau are transferred from Northeastern Asia to Southeastern Asia.
- The Caroline Islands and all other Pacific islands lying north of the equator and between longitudes 140° east and 140° west, with the exception of the Gilbert Islands, will be transferred from the zone of Australasia to the zone of Northeastern Asia. Islands under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska remain in the zone of North America.

The number of Counselors is now raised to fifty-seven by the appointment of Mr. Friday Ekpe and Mr. Zekrullah Kazemi in Northwestern Africa, Mr. Hushang Ahdieh and Mr. Peter Vuyiya in Central and East Africa, Dr. Sarah Pereira and Mrs. Velma Sherrill in North America, Mr. Rowland Estall and Mr. Paul Lucas in Central America, Mrs. Leonora Armstrong, Mr. Peter McLaren and Mr. Raúl Pavón in

South America, Mr. Dipchand Khianra and Mrs. Zena Sorabjee in South Central Asia, Mr. Firaydún Mítháqíyán in Southeastern Asia, Mr. Richard Benson and Miss Elena Marsella in Northeastern Asia and Miss Violet Hoehnke in Australasia. Dr. William Maxwell who has been rendering distinguished service as a member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Northwestern Africa has been obliged to return to the United States.

Mrs. Zena Sorabjee is appointed Trustee of the new Continental Fund of South Central Asia, while Mr. Hushang Ahdieh and Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí are appointed the new Trustees of the Continental Funds of Central and East Africa and South America respectively.

Beyond these significant developments at the World Center of the Faith and on the continental level, it is becoming increasingly necessary in many parts of the world for the Auxiliary Boards to be reinforced. The nature of the work differs from zone to zone and The Universal House of Justice is now consulting the Boards of Counselors on this matter before making an announcement.

The decisions now announced are the outcome of deliberation extending over a number of years, reinforced by consultations with the Hands of the Cause of God, and especially with the Hands residing in the Holy Land who were requested in 1968 to assist The Universal House of Justice in the establishment of the International Teaching Centre, a task that now increases in magnitude as that Center begins its work.

It is our fervent prayer that the Blessed Beauty will abundantly confirm this latest unfoldment of His divinely-purposed Administrative Order.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Zones of the Continental Boards of Counselors  
As Revised by The Universal House of Justice in May 1973

1. **Northwestern Africa** All the continent of Africa west of the eastern frontiers of Tunisia, Algeria, Niger and Nigeria plus the Cape Verde Islands.
2. **Central and East Africa** All the continent of Africa east of the western frontiers of Libya, Chad and the United Cameroon Republic and north of the southern frontiers of Zaïre and Tanzania plus the islands of Fernando Póo, Príncipe, São Tomé and Annobón in the Atlantic Ocean and Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia Islands in the Indian Ocean.
3. **Southern Africa** All the continent of Africa south of the northern frontiers of Angola, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique plus the Island of Madagascar and all islands in the

Atlantic and Indian Oceans between longitudes 20l west and 80 east and south of the equator with the exception of the Islands of Annobón, Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia which are assigned to the zone of Central and East Africa.

4. **North America**All the continent of America north of the southern frontier of the United States plus all offshore islands in the Pacific and Arctic Oceans including the Aleutian chain and all islands under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, also Greenland and all offshore islands politically belonging to Greenland, all islands in the Atlantic Ocean west of longitude 40a west and between latitude 60 north and the Tropic of Cancer plus those Bahama Islands lying south of the Tropic of Cancer.
5. **Central America**All the continent of America south of the northern frontier of Mexico and north of the southern frontier of Panama plus the offshore islands in the Pacific Ocean belonging politically to countries of this zone plus Clipperton Island, all islands in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea south of the Tropic of Cancer except the Bahama Islands which are allocated to the zone of North America and islands belonging politically to Colombia and Venezuela, the islands of Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago which are all allocated to the zone of South America.
6. **South America**All the continent of South America, the Galápagos Islands, Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago, all islands in the Caribbean and North Atlantic Oceans belonging politically to countries of this zone plus all islands in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans south of the equator and between longitude 120e west and longitude 20 west.
7. **Western Asia**All the continent of Asia west of the eastern boundaries of Pakistan, Sinkiang, the Mongolian Republic, the Oblasts of Chita and Irkutsk and the Kray of Krasnoyarsk and east of the western boundaries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, plus those parts of Turkey and Kazakhstan which lie in Europe and including the Transcaucasian S.S.R.s of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as all islands in the Persian Gulf and islands in the Arabian Sea belonging politically to countries of this zone.
8. **South Central Asia**India, Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Laccadive, Maldives, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
9. **Southeastern Asia**China south of the northern boundaries of Yunnan, Szechwan, Hupeh, Anhwei and Kiangsu, as well as Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau. Excluding Portuguese Timor.
10. **Northeastern Asia**All the Soviet Union east of the western boundary of the Yakutsk A.S.S.R. and the Oblast of Amur, China east of Sinkiang and north of the southern

boundaries of Tsinghai, Kansu, Shensi, Honan and Shantung; Korea, Japan, Taiwan and all islands belonging politically to those nations plus all islands in the Pacific Ocean north of the equator and between the longitudes of 140d east and 140 west with the exception of the Gilbert Islands and those islands under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, but including those Caroline Islands lying west of longitude 140e east.

11. **Australasia**Australia and New Zealand plus all islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans lying south of the equator and between the longitudes of 80 east and 120 west including Portuguese Timor and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands but excepting Indonesia.

12. **Europe**The entire continent of Europe less those portions of Kazakhstan and Turkey which lie in Europe, plus Iceland and all islands in the Atlantic Ocean north of latitude 60s north which belong politically to nations of the European continent plus all islands in the Atlantic Ocean east of longitude 40 west and between latitude 60n north and the Tropic of Cancer plus all islands of the Mediterranean Sea including Cyprus but excluding islands belonging politically to nations of the African and Asiatic continents.

Membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors, According to the New Boundaries of May 1973.

(New appointments are indicated with an asterisk.)

#### **Northwestern Africa**

Ḥusayn Ardikání (Trustee of Continental Fund)

\* Friday Ekpe

\* Zekrullah Kazemi

Muḥammad Kebdani

#### **Central and East Africa**

\* Hushang Ahdieh (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Oloro Epyeru

Kolonario Oule

Isobel Sabri

Mihdí Samandarí

\* Peter Vuyiya

**Southern Africa**Seewoosumbur-Jeehoba Appa

Shidan Fat'he-Aazam (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Bahíyyih Winckler

North America

Lloyd Gardner

\* Sarah Pereira

\* Velma Sherrill

Edna True (Trustee of Continental Fund)

### **Central America**

Carmen de Burafato

\* Rowland Estall

Artemus Lamb

\* Paul Lucas

Alfred Osborne (Trustee of Continental Fund)

### **South America**

\* Leonora Armstrong

Athos Costas

Mas'úd Khamsí (Trustee of Continental Fund)

\* Peter McLaren

\* Raúl Pavón

Donald Witzel

### **Western Asia**

Iraj Ayman

Masíḥ Farhangí

Hádí Raḥmání (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Manúchihr Salmánpúr

### **South Central Asia**

Shirin Boman

\* Dipchand Khianra

\* Zena Sorabjee (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Sankaran-Nair Vasudevan

### **Southeastern Asia**

\* Firaydún Mítháqíyán

Khudáraḥm Paymán (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Vicente Samaniego

Chellie Sundram

Yan Kee Leong

## **Northeastern Asia**

\* Richard Benson

John McHenry III

\* Elena Marsella

Rúḥu'lláh Mumtází (Trustee of Continental Fund)

## **Australasia**

Suhayl 'Alá'í

\* Violet Hoehnke

Howard Harwood

Thelma Perks (Trustee of Continental Fund)

## **Europe**

Erik Blumenthal

Anneliese Bopp

Dorothy Ferraby

Louis Hénuzet (Trustee of Continental Fund)

Betty Reed

## The Universal House of Justice

7 October 1973

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In order to meet the growing needs of an ever-expanding Bahá'í World Community we have taken two decisions designed to reinforce and extend the services of the Auxiliary Boards.

First, the number of Auxiliary Board members throughout the world is to be raised to two hundred and seventy, of whom eighty-one will serve on the Auxiliary Boards for the Protection of the Faith and one hundred and eighty-nine will serve on the Auxiliary Boards for the Propagation of the Faith. In all there will be fifty-four Auxiliary Board members in Africa, eighty-one in the Western Hemisphere, eighty-one in Asia, eighteen in Australasia and thirty-six in Europe.

Secondly, we have decided to take a further step in the development of the institution by giving to each Continental Board of Counselors the discretion to authorize individual Auxiliary Board members to appoint assistants. Such authorization does not have to be given to all the Auxiliary Board members in a zone nor does the number assigned have to be the same for all Board members; indeed certain Boards of Counselors may decide that the present circumstances in their zones do not require them to take advantage of this possibility. Such matters are left entirely to the discretion of each Continental Board of Counselors.

The exact nature of the duties and the duration of the appointment of the assistants is also left to each Continental Board to decide for itself. Their aims should be to activate and encourage Local Spiritual Assemblies, to call the attention of Local Spiritual Assembly members to the importance of holding regular meetings, to encourage local communities to meet for the Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days, to help deepen their fellow-believers' understanding of the Teachings, and generally to assist the Auxiliary Board members in the discharge of their duties. Appointments may be made for a limited period, such as a year or two, with the possibility of reappointment. Believers can serve at the same time both as assistants to Auxiliary Board members and on administrative institutions.

It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that this new development in the institution of the Auxiliary Boards will lead to an unprecedented strengthening of the Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



|  | <b>Auxiliary<br/>Board for<br/>Protection</b> | <b>Auxiliary<br/>Board for<br/>Propagation</b> |
|--|---|--|
|--|---|--|

### **Africa**

|                  |    |    |
|------------------|----|----|
| Northwestern     | 3  | 9  |
| Central and East | 13 | 19 |
| Southern         | 2  | 8  |
|                  | 18 | 36 |

### **Western Hemisphere**

|                 |    |    |
|-----------------|----|----|
| North America   | 9  | 18 |
| Central America | 9  | 9  |
| South America   | 9  | 27 |
|                 | 27 | 54 |

### **Asia**

|               |    |    |
|---------------|----|----|
| Western       | 9  | 18 |
| South Central | 3  | 15 |
| Southeastern  | 3  | 15 |
| Northeastern  | 3  | 15 |
|               | 18 | 63 |

### **Australasia**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 9 | 9 |
|---|---|

### **Europe**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 9 | 27 |
|---|----|

**TOTAL**

**81**

**189**

The Universal House of Justice

4 December 1973

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

REJOICE ANNOUNCE FRIENDS BEAUTIFICATION DURING CONFLICT AGITATING MIDDLE EAST  
FOURTH QUADRANT AREA SURROUNDING MOST HOLY SHRINE EMBRACING OLIVE GROVE  
SOUTHWEST PILGRIM HOUSE BAHJÍ. BLESSED SHRINE AND MANSION NOW COMPLETELY  
ENCIRCLED BEAUTIFUL GARDENS INSPIRED BY PATTERN ḤARAM-I-AQDAS CREATED BY BELOVED  
GUARDIAN. PRAYING SHRINES SUPPORTERS MOST GREAT NAME EVERY LAND MAY REDOUBLE  
EFFORTS PROMOTE INTERESTS PRECIOUS FAITH IN ANTICIPATION FIVE YEAR GLOBAL PLAN  
SOON TO BE LAUNCHED.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice

7 February 1974

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE ACCEPTANCE EXQUISITE DESIGN CONCEIVED BY ḤUSAYN AMÁNAT FOR BUILDING TO SERVE AS PERMANENT SEAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE MOUNT CARMEL. DECISION MADE TO PROCEED NEGOTIATE CONTRACTS CONSTRUCTION THIS NOBLE EDIFICE SECOND THOSE BUILDINGS DESTINED ARISE AROUND ARC CONSTITUTE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER BAHÁ'Í WORLD.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Naw-Rúz 1974

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

To supplement the message which is being addressed to each of your Communities giving its specific goals under the Five Year Plan, we now share with you a number of elucidations. Certain of the paragraphs which follow may apply to goals which have not been allotted to your community, but it will no doubt be of interest to you to read them in relation to the worldwide scope of the Plan.

When choosing localities to be opened to the Faith and when deciding which localities should have Local Spiritual Assemblies, you should bear in mind the need to have the Bahá'í community represented broadly across the area under your jurisdiction. It is likely that some areas will show themselves particularly receptive and numerous Bahá'í communities will speedily arise there, but while fostering such growth you should not neglect those areas in which the Faith is as yet unrepresented.

The institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly is of primary importance in the firm establishment of the Faith, and we hope that you will give particular attention to ensuring that as many as possible, and in increasing numbers, are, in the words of the beloved Guardian, "broad-based, securely grounded" and "efficiently functioning."

The time has come, we believe, when increasing numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies should assume responsibility for helping the teaching work of groups, isolated believers, and other Spiritual Assemblies in their neighborhood. Such extension teaching goals should be assigned by the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its teaching committees, or can be spontaneously adopted by Local Spiritual Assemblies, and should be carried out within the framework of the overall teaching plans of the country. It should also be made clear that by being given such goals a Spiritual Assembly is not being given any jurisdiction over believers outside its area, still less over other Local Spiritual Assemblies, but is being called upon to collaborate with them in their work.

The Five Year Plan does not include specific goals for the recognition of Bahá'í marriage certificates or of Bahá'í Holy Days because, in most countries where these goals are not already won, achievement depends upon circumstances beyond our control. Nevertheless, National Spiritual Assemblies should bear in mind the need to increase recognition of the Faith and should be alert to possibilities of winning these goals where they are as yet unattained.

There are a number of national incorporation goals of the Nine Year Plan towards the attainment of which considerable progress has already been made. These have not been included as goals of the Five Year Plan

although they are still pending, but of course they should be pursued to completion.

If acquisition of a National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds is a responsibility assigned to you under the Five Year Plan, you should treat it as an urgent matter in view of the worldwide condition of inflation and rising property costs. Such a building, which must be suitable to serve as the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly, should be purchased as economically as possible. Preferably it should be a freehold detached building, although if such is not obtainable, a semidetached house or an apartment may be considered, or even a property on a long-term lease.

A site for a future Maṣḥríqu'l-Adhḥár can be as small as 8,000 square meters in area if a larger property would be too expensive. It should, if possible, be situated within the city designated or, if this is not feasible, within 25 kilometers from the city.

A national endowment should be regarded as an investment in real estate owned by the National Spiritual Assembly. It may be anywhere in the country and can be a small, inexpensive piece of land donated by one of the friends, or else acquired out of the resources of the National Fund.

Where we have given a goal to acquire a Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds which is to serve the entire community in a certain country, it is to be a local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds at the present time but should be of a size and quality to serve as an administrative center and focal point for the whole community. We envisage that some of such Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds may, at a later date, be converted into National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, and this fact should be borne in mind when acquiring them.

In the goal for local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds given to some communities we state that a certain number should be large enough to accommodate activities of a number of communities in the surrounding district. While not being at all in the same category as the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds described in the last paragraph above, these particular buildings are intended to be rather more substantial structures than the average local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, and should be located in areas which form easily accessible, central gathering places for districts in which large numbers of Bahá'ís are living. In addition to serving as a local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds for its own town or village, such a building can be used for district gatherings, for the holding of teaching institutes, conferences, deepening classes, etc., for the larger area, and could possibly accommodate the office of the district teaching committee.

In general we intend that the local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds called for in the Plan should be very simple structures to serve as focal points and meeting places for the local communities. It is hoped that land for them can be provided by local believers and that they can be built, for the most part, by the local friends. In certain instances the National Spiritual Assembly may feel justified in giving a small amount of assistance from the National Fund.

The acquisition of local endowments, which is given as a specific goal to some national communities, is intended to assist in the consolidation of local communities and to foster the spirit of unity and collaboration among the believers. A local endowment can be quite a small piece of land; it can be purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly or is more usually the gift of one or more of the believers. If the

Local Spiritual Assembly is incorporated, the endowment should be registered in its name, but if it is not, the endowment can be held by one or more of the believers on behalf of the community. For example, if one of the believers gives a small piece of land he can continue to hold it in his name, but it will be known that he does so on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly and that the land will in time be transferred legally to the Assembly when that is possible. In some countries land is owned by the state or the tribe and only the use of the land can be assigned; in such places the goal can be considered achieved if the Local Spiritual Assembly can obtain the use of a plot of land in its own name. In some countries, even if the land can be purchased, government regulations require that within a specific time a building must be erected on land held by religious institutions. This problem can be met in several ways: it may be possible for the Spiritual Assembly to obtain the use of, or acquire, a plot of land for agricultural purposes, thus avoiding the need to erect a building; or if the most practical course is to erect on the land a Bahá'í institution such as a local Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds, the Assembly could, in its own records, demarcate a portion of the land to be the endowment, distinct from the portion on which the Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds stands.

One of the characteristics of Bahá'í society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings would fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of the Teachings if such gatherings could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory, but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually.

The holding of regular national teaching conferences has proved to be a valuable stimulus to the work in a number of countries, as well as a means for forging more strongly the bonds of unity among the believers. Beyond this, many national communities are presented with a special opportunity to hold a highly effective teaching conference at the time of the eight Intercontinental Conferences which are being called at the midway point of the Plan. Believers traveling to and from these Intercontinental Conferences are likely to be eager to assist the work in the countries through which they pass. Therefore, if you hold a national conference shortly after the Intercontinental Conference which is nearest to you, it may well be attended by believers from other lands who will bring with them the spirit of that Conference, and, by augmenting the numbers attending your national conference will greatly assist its effectiveness as a means of proclaiming the Faith and enthusing those believers who will have been unable to attend the Intercontinental Conferences.

Bahá'í youth should be encouraged to think of their studies and of their training for a trade or profession as part of their service to the Cause of God and in the context of a lifetime that will be devoted to advancing the interests of the Faith. At the same time, during their years of study, youth are often able to offer specific periods of weeks or months, or even of a year or more, during which they can devote themselves to travel teaching or to serving the Bahá'í community in other ways, such as conducting children's classes in remote villages. They should be encouraged to offer such service, which will in itself be admirable experience for

the future, and the National Assembly should instruct an appropriate committee to receive such offers and to organize their implementation so as to derive the greatest possible advantage from them.

A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries, is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Bahá'í community.

Enclosed with this letter you will receive a list of pioneer assistance initially called for at the opening of the Plan. Any National Spiritual Assembly which has pioneers abroad from previous plans is still responsible for helping them to remain at their posts, or for replacing them, if the services they have been rendering are still needed. However, if you have any still unfilled pioneer goals from the Nine Year Plan or from the current year, you may consider them canceled, because such unfilled goals have been taken into consideration in assigning the goals of the Five Year Plan. Best results can be obtained when pioneer projects are arranged in consultation between the sending and receiving National Spiritual Assemblies or their appropriate committees.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: 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 program 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 Center of the Faith, and by national and local communities.

At the World Center 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-Adhikárs—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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 program 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 program 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 nonacceptance 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 programs 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 worldwide 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 shed 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 Riḍván. 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 wholehearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programs, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honor. 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 fellowmen and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.

The deeds and programs, all these multifarious worldwide 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 Center 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 Counselors around the world, the love, the guidance, the assistance of the Hands, through the Boards of Counselors, 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-honored 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



28 April 1974

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The various questions you set forth in your letter of 18 February were noted, and we offer you the following comments.

The Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and indeed all the Teachings of the Faith, form a coherent whole; therefore in order to understand their implications they must be considered in their own context. For example, in the case of intestacy, as you have noted, the eldest son receives preferential treatment in certain respects but, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained in one of His Tablets, he should take into consideration the needs of the other heirs.

Furthermore it should be remembered that, as Shoghi Effendi has explained (see *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 148), Bahá'u'lláh has deliberately left gaps in the body of His legislative ordinances, to be filled in due course by The Universal House of Justice.

You should, therefore, when studying the *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, bear these factors in mind, and always remember Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it."

The equality of men and women, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has often explained, is a fundamental principle of Bahá'u'lláh; therefore the Laws of the Aqdas should be studied in the light of this. Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of function. In some things women excel men, in others men are better than women, while in very many things the difference in sex is of no effect at all. The differences are most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching effects. For example, because of this, daughters receive preference in education over sons. Again, for physiological reasons, women are granted exemptions from fasting that are not applied to men.

It is apparent from the Guardian's writings that where Bahá'u'lláh has expressed a law as between a man and a woman it applies, mutatis mutandis, between a woman and a man unless the context should make this impossible. For example, the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas forbids a man to marry his father's wife (i.e., his stepmother), and the Guardian has indicated that likewise a woman is forbidden to marry her stepfather. In the case you cite, however, that of a wife who is found by her husband not to have been a virgin, the

dissolution of the marriage can be demanded only "If the marriage has been conditioned on virginity"; presumably, therefore, if the wife wishes to exercise such a right in respect to the husband, she would have to include a condition as to his virginity in the marriage contract, and this would seem to be one of those matters on which The Universal House of Justice will have to legislate in due course.

Although The Universal House of Justice has to apply and supplement the laws of the Aqdas, it has no right at all to change any law that Bahá'u'lláh has specifically revealed. As clearly stated by the Guardian, the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "remain inviolate" during the entire Dispensation....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

9 June 1974

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iceland

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Thank you for your letter of 4 March 1974 enclosing the inquiry from the Bahá'í Group of Ísafjörður. It has become apparent from a number of questions we have received that many believers are not clear which are those laws already binding upon the Bahá'ís in the West. We therefore feel it is timely to clarify the situation, and the simplest way is to state those laws listed in the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which are not at present binding upon the friends in the western world. For ease of reference we give the numbers of the sections listed.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| IV.A.(4)(c) | The law regarding the exemption from obligatory prayer granted to women in their courses.  |
| IV.A.(10)   | The law concerning ablutions, with the exception of the ablutions required for the Medium Obligatory Prayer which are described in Section CLXXXII of Prayers and Meditations and are required for the recitation of that prayer.  |
| IV.A. (12)  | The law concerning actions to be taken in place of an Obligatory Prayer missed on account of insecure conditions.  |
| IV.B.(5)(a) | The definition of travelers for the purpose of exemption from fasting. Instead of these definitions the believers in the West should observe the following guidance given by the beloved Guardian's secretary on his behalf: "travelers are exempt from fasting, but if they want to fast while they are traveling, they are free to do so. You are exempt the whole period of your travel, not just the hours you are in a train or car, etc...." |
| IV.B.(5)(f) | The law regarding the exemption from fasting granted to women in their courses.  |
| IV.C.(1)(i) | The laws governing betrothal.  |
| IV.C.(1)(j) | The law concerning the payment of a dowry by the groom to the bride on marriage.   |



|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| IV.C.(1)(l)<br>and (m)              | The laws concerning the traveling of a husband away from his wife.  |
| IV.C.(1)(n)<br>and (o)              | The laws relating to the virginity of the wife.   |
| IV.C.(2)(b)                         | That part of the divorce law relating to fines payable to the House of Justice.   |
| IV.C.(3)                            | The law of inheritance. This is normally covered by civil laws of intestacy at the present time.  |
| IV.D.(1)(a)                         | The law of pilgrimage.  |
| IV.D.(1)(b)                         | The law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is not yet applied to the western friends.   |
| IV.D.(1)(d)                         | The law of the Mash <u>ri</u> qu'l-Ad <u>h</u> kár is gradually being put into effect.  |
| IV.D.(1)(f)                         | The Bahá'í Festivals are being celebrated by the western friends on their anniversaries in the Gregorian calendar until such time as The Universal House of Justice deems it desirable to pass supplementary legislation necessary for the full implementation of the Badí' calendar.       |
| IV.D.(1)(j)                         | The age of maturity applies only to Bahá'í religious duties as yet. On other matters it is subject to the civil law of each country. The age of administrative maturity in the Bahá'í community has, for the time being, been fixed at 21.  |
| IV.D.(1)(k)                         | For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour's journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased is a believer over the age of 15. |
| IV.D.(1)(p)                         | The law of tithes.  |
| IV.D.(1)(q)                         | The law concerning the repetition of the Greatest Name 95 times a day.  |
| IV.D.(1)(r)                         | The law concerning the hunting of animals.  |
| IV.D.(1)(t),<br>(u), (v) and<br>(w) | The laws relating to the finding of lost property, the disposition of treasure trove, the disposal of objects held in trust and compensation for manslaughter are all designed for  |

a future state of society. These matters are usually covered by the civil law of each country.

IV.D.(1)(y) Arson, adultery, murder and theft are all forbidden to Bahá'ís, but the punishments  
(xiv),(xv), prescribed for them in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are designed for a future state of society. Such  
(xvi) and matters are usually covered by the civil laws of each country.  
(xvii)

IV.D.(1)(y) The laws prohibiting the use of the type of pools which used to be found in Persian  
(xxv),(xxx), baths, the plunging of one's hand in food, the shaving of one's head and the growth of  
(xxxi) and men's hair below the lobe of the ear.  
(xxxii)

All the exhortations, listed in section IV.D.(3), are applicable universally at the present time insofar as it is possible for the friends to implement them; for example, the exhortation to teach one's children to chant the Holy Verses in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can be literally carried out only on a limited scale at the present time, but the friends should, nevertheless, teach their children the Holy Writings as far as possible.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

22 July 1974

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In view of the ever-increasing number of pioneers and traveling teachers now arising from various countries to serve the Cause of God in widely scattered lands throughout all continents The Universal House of Justice has considered ways of deriving maximum benefit from the services of these devoted believers, coordinating their efforts and anticipating the needs of the future.

The Continental Boards of Counselors will soon be approaching you about the need for pioneers and traveling teachers for the period ending Riqvân 1976.

The functions of the Continental Pioneer Committees have been reviewed and developed in a way that will enable them to operate in closer collaboration with the Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies of their areas. A copy of the statement outlining the functions of the Continental Pioneer Committees as now revised is attached for your information. As you will note, the members of these Committees will henceforth be appointed by The Universal House of Justice. Nothing in the functions now assigned to the Continental Pioneer Committees in any way detracts from the primary responsibility of National Spiritual Assemblies to foster and promote pioneering and traveling teaching.

It is our hope and prayer that as the Five Year Plan unfolds evidences of closer ties of cooperation among the various institutions of the Faith will be increasingly witnessed in every land.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

29 July 1974

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have received your letter of 19 June 1974 describing the preoccupation of some American believers with the date of the Lesser Peace, and with their feeling that “the calamity,” as a prelude to that peace, is imminent.

It is true that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made statements linking the establishment of the unity of nations to the twentieth century. For example: “The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which, in this century, will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.” And, in *The Promised Day Is Come*, following a similar statement quoted from *Some Answered Questions*, Shoghi Effendi makes this comment: “This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established.”

There is also this statement from a letter written in 1946 to an individual believer on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary:

All we know is that the Lesser and the Most Great Peace *will* come—their exact dates we do not know. The same is true as regards the possibility of a future war; we cannot state dogmatically it will or will not take place—all we know is that mankind must suffer and be punished sufficiently to make it turn to God.

It is apparent that the disintegration of the old order is accelerating, but the friends should not permit this inevitable process to deter them from giving their undivided attention to the tasks lying immediately before them. Let them take heart from the reassuring words of Shoghi Effendi contained in the closing paragraphs of his momentous message of June 5, 1947, and concentrate on the challenging tasks of this hour.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

19 November 1974

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In your letter of 11 September you say that the questions of how to help the Third World or the poor who are suffering under calamities are much discussed in your community and you wish to know whether to create a special fund for such needs, to ask for special contributions from time to time, or whether there are other ways in which you could help.

It is understandable that Bahá'ís who witness the miserable conditions under which so many human beings have to live, or who hear of a sudden disaster that has struck a certain area of the world, are moved to do something practical to ameliorate those conditions and to help their suffering fellow-mortals.

There are many ways in which help can be rendered. Every Bahá'í has the duty to acquire a trade or profession through which he will earn that wherewith he can support himself and his family; in the choice of such work he can seek those activities which are of benefit to his fellowmen and not merely those which promote his personal interests, still less those whose effects are actually harmful.

There are also the situations in which an individual Bahá'í or a Spiritual Assembly is confronted with an urgent need which neither justice nor compassion could allow to go unheeded and unhelped. How many are the stories told of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in such situations, when He would even take off a garment He was wearing and give it to a shivering man in rags.

But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning—a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives—they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behavior. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed. There are mighty agencies in this world, governments, foundations, institutions of many kinds with tremendous financial resources which are working to improve the material lot of human beings. Anything we Bahá'ís could add to such resources in the way of special funds or contributions would be a negligible drop in the ocean. However, alone among men we have the divinely given remedy for the real ills of mankind; no one else is

doing or can do this most important work, and if we divert our energy and our funds into fields in which others are already doing more than we can hope to do, we shall be delaying the diffusion of the Divine Message which is the most important task of all.

Because of such an attitude, and also because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the "real problems" of their fellowmen. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only "real" good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

6 January 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are glad to announce that preparations are being made for next Ríḍván by the friends in several countries in West Africa and one in the Near East to form, in accordance with the provisions of the Five Year Plan, their new National Spiritual Assemblies. In Western Africa, the National Spiritual Assembly of Dahomey, Togo and Niger will divide into three separate national communities for each of the three countries which presently compose the region, with their seats in Cotonou, Lomé and Niamey respectively, while the National Spiritual Assemblies of West Africa and of Upper West Africa will each split into two units, the former into Liberia and Guinea, with its seat in Monrovia, and Sierra Leone, with its seat in Freetown, and the latter into the Gambia, with its seat in Banjul, and a new National Spiritual Assembly with the name of Upper West Africa comprising Sénégal, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands, with its seat in Dakar. In the Near East the National Spiritual Assembly of Jordan will be formed, with its seat in 'Ammán. These developments on the national level will result in a net increase next Ríḍván of five National Spiritual Assemblies, but in view of the inability of the friends in Indonesia to maintain national administrative activities, the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies will thus be raised throughout the world to 119.

Of the five new National Spiritual Assemblies, four will have their seats in Western Africa. Three more National Spiritual Assemblies are scheduled to be formed in this area in the course of the Plan. The mighty potentialities for growth and expansion in the western regions of Africa are such as to justify a corresponding development of the institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors in that vast and promising area. The decision has been taken, therefore, after consultation with the International Teaching Centre, to break the present zone of Northwestern Africa into two separate zones of Northern and Western Africa, to each of which will be transferred parts of the Central and East African zone. The zone of Northern Africa will comprise Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Spanish Sahara. The zone of Western Africa will consist of Mauritania, Sénégal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Because of the creation of a new Board for Northern Africa, the Counselors in this and the one for Western Africa must be regrouped, new appointments made to the Northern Board, and the number of Auxiliary Board members increased. We decided, therefore, that the Board for Northern Africa will consist of Mr. Muḥammad Kebdani, already serving as a Counselor, Mr. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá, and Mr. 'Imád Šábirán. The

Board for Western Africa will consist of Mr. Ḥusayn Ardikání (Trustee), Mr. Friday Ekpe, Mr. Zekrullah Kazemi, and Dr. Mihdí Samandarí (transferred from the Central and East African Board).

We are also increasing the number of Auxiliary Board members in Africa, adding 9 members to the Board for Protection, and 9 to that for Propagation, bringing the totals for that continent to 27 and 45 respectively, allocated according to the following schedule:

|                         | <b>Auxiliary Board<br/>members for<br/>Protection</b> | <b>Auxiliary Board<br/>members for<br/>Propagation</b> |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Central and East Africa | 13  | 19   |
| Southern Africa         | 4   | 10   |
| Northern Africa         | 5   | 5  |
| Western Africa          | 5   | 11   |
|                         | <b>27</b>   | <b>45</b>  |

We pray at the Holy Shrines that these decisions, which reflect the growth of our beloved Faith in Africa, will pave the way for speedier progress, wider expansion and greater consolidation, as the friends of that mighty continent forge ahead in their efforts to promote and protect the precious Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



14 January 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

JOYOUSLY ANNOUNCE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION LENGTHY DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS RESULTING ACQUISITION BY PURCHASE HOLY HOUSE CENTER COVENANT 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ BIRTHPLACE BELOVED GUARDIAN SHOGHI EFFENDI. HISTORIC PROPERTY ADJACENT BARRACKS MOST GREAT PRISON COMPRISES LAND AREA APPROXIMATING SEVEN THOUSAND SQUARE METERS INCLUDES OTHER STRUCTURES WITHIN COMPLEX ASSURING PERMANENT PROTECTION HOUSE VISITED BY MANY PILGRIMS TURN CENTURY SCENE HISTORIC VISIT FIRST GROUP WESTERN PILGRIMS. PLANS BEING PREPARED RESTORATION HOLY HOUSE BEAUTIFICATION GROUNDS AS ADDITIONAL PLACE PILGRIMAGE WORLD CENTER WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES FUNDS PERMIT. OFFER HUMBLE THANKSGIVING BAHÁ'U'LLÁH THIS GREAT BLESSING.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

4 March 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Immediately after sending the cable announcing the joyful news of the acquisition of this property [the house of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá], The Universal House of Justice had the enclosed article prepared at the World Center, and it is sent for you to disseminate as you see fit.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá

Some of the most poignant, dramatic and historically significant events of the Heroic Age of our Faith are associated with this house, which derives its name from the Governor of 'Akká who built it and used it as his official residence during his term of office, from 1820 to 1832. It stands just inside the northwestern corner of the sea wall of 'Akká, in the close neighborhood of the citadel where Bahá'u'lláh was confined. The main building is L-shaped, facing south and east on its outer prospects. The structure, though chiefly on two stories, is irregular and on the inside angle has balconies, uncovered stairways, a bathhouse and a well. The entire property comprises large courtyards and is bounded on the west, or seaward, side by a wall, which turns due east at its southern angle and continues towards the heart of 'Akká, forming after a few yards, the wall of a narrow street; at the eastern terminus of this wall, and within the property, is an imposing house which was occupied by that Governor of 'Akká whose incumbency coincided with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence in the main building, and whose northern windows permitted him to maintain a constant surveillance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's activities. Beyond this house is a small mosque. The eastern boundary of the property is a row of houses giving directly, on its western aspect, to the courtyard and offering many additional vantage points for observing the Master. A similar row of houses extends from the northeastern corner along the northern boundary until they terminate at the longitudinal wing of the main building which, at this point, projects northwards into several conjoined buildings, making a large irregular outcrop on the northern boundary. The western end of the northern boundary is a short stretch of wall completing the enclosure at the northwestern corner of the west wall. Large stables, coach houses and storerooms line the southern boundary.

In this house, fifty lunar years after the Báb's martyrdom, in January, 1899, the casket containing His sacred and precious remains was received by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who successfully concealed it until it was possible to inter it, with all honors, in its permanent resting-place in the bosom of Carmel. In this house 'Abdu'l-Bahá was confined during the period of His renewed incarceration. Shoghi Effendi, in *God Passes By*, testifies to the conditions of His life at that time:

Even His numerous friends and admirers refrained, during the most turbulent days of this period, from calling upon Him, for fear of being implicated and of incurring the suspicion of the authorities. On certain days and nights, when the outlook was at its darkest, the house in which He was living, and which had for many years been a focus of activity, was completely deserted. Spies, secretly and openly, kept watch around it, observing His every movement and restricting the freedom of His family.

Yet during these troublous times, and from this house, He directed the construction of the Báb's sepulcher on Mount Carmel, erected under its shadow His own house in Haifa and later the Pilgrim House, issued instructions for the restoration of the Báb's holy House in Shiraz and for the erection of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the world in the city of 'Ishqábád. Again the Guardian is our reference for the Master's ceaseless activity at that time:

Eyewitnesses have testified that, during that agitated and perilous period of His life, they had known Him to pen, with His own hand, no less than ninety Tablets in a single day, and to pass many a night, from dusk to dawn, alone in His bedchamber engaged in a correspondence which the pressure of His manifold responsibilities had prevented Him from attending to in the daytime.

It was in this house that His celebrated table talks were given and compiled, to be published later under the title *Some Answered Questions*. In this house and in the darkest hours of a period which the beloved Guardian describes as "the most dramatic period of His ministry," "in the heyday of His life and in the full tide of His power" He penned the first part of His Will and Testament, which delineates the features and lays the foundations of the Administrative Order to arise after His passing. In this house He revealed the highly significant Tablet addressed to the Báb's cousin and chief builder of the 'Ishqábád Temple, a Tablet whose import can be appreciated and grasped only as future events unfold before our eyes, and in which, as testified by Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá "in stirring terms proclaimed the immeasurable greatness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, sounded the warnings foreshadowing the turmoil which its enemies, both far and near, would let loose upon the world, and prophesied, in moving language, the ascendancy which the torch-bearers of the Covenant would ultimately achieve over them."

During the twelve years of His residence in this house, 'Abdu'l-Bahá demonstrated the true nobility of His divine nature; overcame hatred with love; pursued without rest, against ever-mounting opposition, the direction of His Father's Cause; maintained in the face of fanaticism, jealousy and bitterness His unceasing care of the poor and sick; and overcame, with unruffled equanimity, the severest crisis of His life. The Guardian's words testify to these things:

At His table, in those days, whenever there was a lull in the storm raging about Him, there would gather pilgrims, friends and inquirers from most of the aforementioned countries [Persia, the United States, Canada, France, England, Germany, Egypt, 'Iráq, Russia, India, Burma, Japan, and the Pacific Islands], representative of the Christian, the Muslim, the Jewish, the Zoroastrian, the Hindu and Buddhist Faiths. To the needy thronging His doors and filling the courtyard of His house every Friday morning, in spite of the perils that environed Him, He would distribute alms with His own hands, with a regularity and generosity that won Him the title of "Father of the Poor." Nothing in those tempestuous days could shake His confidence, nothing would be allowed to interfere with His ministrations to the destitute, the orphan, the sick, and the downtrodden, nothing could prevent Him from calling in person upon those who were either incapacitated, or ashamed to solicit His aid....

So imperturbable was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's equanimity that, while rumors were being bruited about that He might be cast into the sea, or exiled to Fízá in Tripolitania, or hanged on the gallows, He, to the amazement of His friends and the amusement of His enemies, was to be seen planting trees and vines in the garden of His house, whose fruits when the storm had blown over, He would bid His faithful gardener, Ismá'íl Áqá, pluck and present to those same friends and enemies on the occasion of their visits to Him.

In this house was born the child ordained to hold the destiny of the Faith in his hands for thirty-six years and to become its "beloved Guardian," the child named "Shoghi" by his Grandfather, who grew up under His loving and solicitous care and became the recipient of His Tablets.

When Bahá'u'lláh ascended, in 1892, the Mansion at Bahjí remained in the occupancy of the arch-breaker of the Covenant, the Master's half-brother Muḥammad-'Alí, and members of that branch of Bahá'u'lláh's family. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the members of His family, including His illustrious sister the Greatest Holy Leaf, remained in the House of 'Abbúd, which continued to be 'Abdu'l-Bahá's official residence. In the course of the fifth year after Bahá'u'lláh's passing, the marriage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's two eldest daughters took place, and it quickly became apparent that the portion of the House of 'Abbúd available for occupation was woefully inadequate to the enlarged family. With characteristic vigor 'Abdu'l-Bahá took action and in the months preceding the birth of Shoghi Effendi arranged to rent the main building, and subsequently the subsidiary wings, of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá's house, and He established it as His official residence. Thus it came about that, in 1897, Shoghi Effendi was born in the same house (in an upper room of the wing facing south) that witnessed events of such vital importance to the Faith and the future of mankind.

The Guardian's childhood and upbringing in that house are referred to by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum in *The Priceless Pearl*:

It may sound disrespectful to say the Guardian was a mischievous child, but he himself told me he was the acknowledged ringleader of all the other children. Bubbling with high spirits, enthusiasm and daring, full of laughter and wit, the small boy led the way in many pranks; whenever something was afoot, behind it would be found Shoghi Effendi! This boundless energy was often a source of anxiety as he would rush madly up and down the long flight of high steps to the upper story of the house, to

the consternation of the pilgrims below, waiting to meet the Master. His exuberance was irrepressible and was in the child the same force that was to make the man such an untiring and unflinching commander-in-chief of the forces of Bahá'u'lláh, leading them to victory after victory, indeed, to the spiritual conquest of the entire globe. We have a very reliable witness to this characteristic of the Guardian, 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, Who wrote on a used envelope a short sentence to please His little grandson: "Shoghi Effendi is a wise man—but he runs about very much!"

In those days of Shoghi Effendi's childhood it was the custom to rise about dawn and spend the first hour of the day in the Master's room, where prayers were said and the family all had breakfast with Him. The children sat on the floor, their legs folded under them, their arms folded across their breasts, in great respect; when asked they would chant for 'Abdu'l-Bahá; there was no shouting or unseemly conduct. Breakfast consisted of tea, brewed on the bubbling Russian brass samovar and served in little crystal glasses, very hot and very sweet, pure wheat bread and goats' milk cheese....

It was to this house that that historic first group of pilgrims from the West came to see the Master in the winter of 1898–99, and in which many more from both East and West sought His presence. Some of them have left memorable descriptions of their experiences with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His household in that home. Ella Goodall Cooper, one of the very earliest American believers, records the following:

One day ... I had joined the ladies of the Family in the room of the Greatest Holy Leaf for early morning tea, the beloved Master was sitting in His favourite corner of the divan where, through the window on His right, He could look over the ramparts and see the blue Mediterranean beyond. He was busy writing Tablets, and the quiet peace of the room was broken only by the bubble of the samovar, where one of the young maidservants, sitting on the floor before it, was brewing the tea.

Thornton Chase, the first American believer, records in his memoir, *In Galilee*:

We did not know we had reached our destination until we saw a Persian gentleman, and then another and another, step out at the entrance and smile at us. We alighted and they conducted us through the arched, red brick entrance to an open court, across it to a long flight of stone steps, broken and ancient, leading to the highest story and into a small walled court open to the sky, where was the upper chamber assigned to us, which adjoined the room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The buildings are all of stone, whitewashed and plastered, and it bears the aspect of a prison.

Our windows looked out over the garden and tent of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the sea side of the house. That garden is bounded on one side by the house of the Governor, which overlooks it, and on another by the inner wall of fortification. A few feet beyond that is the outer wall upon the sea, and between these two are the guns and soldiers constantly on guard. A sentry house stands at one corner of the wall and garden, from which the sentry can see the grounds and the tent where 'Abdu'l-Bahá meets transient visitors and the officials who often call on him. Thus all his acts outside of the house itself are visible to the Governor from his windows and to the men on guard. Perhaps that is one reason why the officials so often become his friends. No one, with humanity, justice, or mercy in his heart,

could watch 'Abdu'l-Bahá long without admiring and loving him for the beautiful qualities constantly displayed.

Mary Hanford Ford published an account of her pilgrimage to this house in *Star of the West*, vol. XXIV:

The little room in which I stayed and in which the significant conversations with 'Abdu'l-Bahá took place, was of the simplest description. The floor was covered with matting, the narrow iron bed and the iron wash stand with larger and smaller holes for bowl and pitcher were of that vermin proof description with which I had become familiar. Everything was scrupulously clean, and there was an abundant supply of sparkling water for bathing and drinking. A wide window looked over the huge town wall upon the blue Mediterranean and before this stretched a divan upon which 'Abdu'l-Bahá sat when He came to see me.

The palpable victory which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had wrested from the persecution, intrigue, hatred, vilification even, directed against Him during His twelve years in the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá, was signally apparent when, upon His release from incarceration in 1908, He moved to His new residence in Haifa. At that time the future Guardian was a boy of eleven, but his appointment, although a carefully guarded secret, had already been made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the part of His Will and Testament revealed in that house.

As we contemplate the extraordinary focusing of powerful forces and events upon this house, we eagerly anticipate the day when it will be restored and made ready for pilgrims, who may inhale from its atmosphere, its grounds and sacred walls, the fragrances of a glorious past.

## The Universal House of Justice

25 March 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As we approach the threshold of the second year of the Five Year Plan, it is evident that the need for traveling teachers as indicated in the message launching that Plan is acquiring greater urgency and importance.

During the past year steps have been taken to revise the functions, broaden the base and strengthen the work of the Continental Pioneer Committees and to bring them into much closer collaboration with the Continental Boards of Counselors. Already, with their assistance an army of pioneers has moved and is moving towards its objectives, and a general readiness has been evinced by the friends, particularly the youth, to serve as itinerant teachers.

The strenuous efforts being made to fill the pioneer goals by the midway point of the Plan must now be paralleled by well-considered and determined efforts to swell to a mighty river the stream of those friends who will travel to foreign lands to reinforce the efforts of those who are laboring so valiantly to expand and consolidate the widely scattered Bahá'í communities and to proclaim the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to every stratum of society.

At our request the International Teaching Centre has evolved a plan, which we have warmly approved, comprising specific goals of international collaboration in the field of traveling teaching. This plan is now being sent to the Continental Boards of Counselors who will, in turn, present it to the National Spiritual Assemblies, whose task it will be to implement it. In consultation with the Counselors each National Spiritual Assembly is to work out specific proposals which it should then present to the other National Assemblies with whom it is to collaborate, so that, as soon as possible, actual projects can be worked out and set in motion, thus inaugurating a process which should rapidly gather momentum and be prosecuted with undiminished vigor in the years ahead.

The Continental Pioneer Committees should be kept closely informed of all projects so that they may know how best to reinforce the flow with those many volunteers who will undoubtedly arise outside the framework of the specific projects now to be conceived. It is our hope that, as far as possible, travel teaching projects will be self-supporting or can be assisted by the National Funds involved, but where necessary, the International Deputization Fund is available to assist. Whenever assistance from the Deputization Fund is required, the request should be made to the Continental Pioneer Committee, giving details of the project. If the sum required is small the Committee may be able to help immediately;

otherwise it will pass the request, together with its recommendation, to The Universal House of Justice for consideration.

We sincerely hope that in the forefront of the volunteers, the Bahá'í youth will arise for the sake of God and, through their driving force, their ability to endure inhospitable and arduous conditions, and their contentment with the bare necessities of life, they will offer an inspiring example to the peoples and communities they set out to serve, will exert an abiding influence on their personal lives, and will promote with distinction the vital interests of God's Cause at this crucial stage in the fortunes of the Plan.

We shall offer our ardent prayers at the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of the efforts of all those who will heroically respond to this call.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



4 April 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

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 CENTER NOW BEING LAUNCHED BY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES IN CONSULTATION COUNSELORS. BELOVED HANDS CAUSE ADVANCING VANGUARD ARMY LIGHT LENDING CONSTANT LOVING GUIDANCE ENCOURAGEMENT PROTECTION FRIENDS LABORING DIVINE VINEYARD. WORLD CENTER 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.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

14 May 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In December 1967 The Universal House of Justice wrote to all National Spiritual Assemblies expressing the need of the World Center for letters written by the Guardian to them, or to their subsidiary institutions, as well as to the friends under their jurisdiction.

The response to this request was encouraging, but it is obvious that there are many letters which have not yet been received.

The Universal House of Justice requests you, therefore, to check again in your archives or files of correspondence with the Guardian for any further letters which have not yet been forwarded to the World Center and to appeal to the believers under your jurisdiction, calling upon those who were privileged to have received letters from the Guardian to send the text of such letters to the World Center.

To assist your National Spiritual Assembly and the friends to carry out this urgent project the following points from the letter of December 1967 from The Universal House of Justice are here repeated for your consideration.

Recipients of letters from the Guardian have the inherent right of deciding to keep the letters themselves, or to have them preserved for the future in their families. To assist The Universal House of Justice, however, in its efforts to study and compile the letters of the Guardian, the friends are urged to provide, for dispatch to the Holy Land, photostatic copies of their communications from the Guardian if they wish to keep the originals themselves.

If they are not in a position to provide such copies, they should kindly allow National Spiritual Assemblies to undertake this project on our behalf.

Should any believer possess letters so personal and confidential that he does not wish to disclose their contents to any institution other than The Universal House of Justice, he is invited to send either the originals or copies of such letters, marked confidential, directly to The Universal House of Justice, by registered mail, with any instructions he wishes to be followed.

Will you please give this matter your early attention. The Universal House of Justice thanks you warmly for your assistance.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

25 May 1975

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A fifth of the span allotted to the Five Year Plan has run its course and we have passed a major milestone in the destinies of that Plan. It is appropriate for every National Spiritual Assembly to pause in order to appraise its position, and that of the community which it represents and serves, and to determine its progress in relation to the goals with which it stands identified.

To help each National Spiritual Assembly in this appraisal we send you the following statement which, under various headings, outlines the impressions we have gathered and comments we are prompted to make on the prosecution of certain goals of the Plan. Although some of the items may not be directly applicable to you, you may find them of interest. Each National Spiritual Assembly should determine, in the light of the goals assigned to it, to what extent each of our observations is applicable to its work.

### **Teaching—Expansion and Consolidation**

Teaching the Faith embraces many diverse activities, all of which are vital to success, and each of which reinforces the other. Time and again the beloved Guardian emphasized that expansion and consolidation are twin and inseparable aspects of teaching that must proceed simultaneously, yet one still hears believers discussing the virtues of one as against the other. The purpose of teaching is not complete when a person declares that he has accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age; the purpose of teaching is to attract human beings to the divine Message and so imbue them with its spirit that they will dedicate themselves to its service, and this world will become another world and its people another people. Viewed in this light a declaration of faith is merely a milestone along the way—albeit a very important one. Teaching may also be likened to kindling a fire, the fire of faith, in the hearts of men. If a fire burns only so long as the match is held to it, it cannot truly be said to have been kindled; to be kindled it must continue to burn of its own accord. Thereafter more fuel can be added and the flame can be fanned, but even if left alone for a period, a truly kindled fire will not be extinguished by the first breath of wind.

The aim, therefore, of all Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í teachers is to advance continually to new areas and strata of society, with such thoroughness that, as the spark of faith kindles the hearts of the hearers, the teaching of the believers continues until, and even after, they shoulder their responsibilities as Bahá'ís and participate in both the teaching and administrative work of the Faith.

There are now many areas in the world where thousands of people have accepted the Faith so quickly that it has been beyond the capacity of the existing Bahá'í communities to consolidate adequately these

advances. The people in these areas must be progressively deepened in their understanding of the Faith, in accordance with well-laid plans, so that their communities may, as soon as possible, become sources of great strength to the work of the Faith and begin to manifest the pattern of Bahá'í life.

### **Reaching Remote Areas—an Immediate Challenge**

At the same time there is a challenge of great urgency facing the worldwide Bahá'í community. When launching the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi urged the believers to “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.” A number of such regions still exist in places like New Guinea, the heart of Africa and the Amazon Basin in South America. As the influence of civilization spreads, the age-old ways of life of the inhabitants of these regions will inevitably perish, and they will rapidly be infected with the materialistic ideas of a decadent civilization. It is our pressing duty to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to such people while they are still purehearted and receptive, and through it to prepare them for the changed world which will come upon them.

### **Teaching Tribal Peoples and Minorities**

In addition to the tribes in these remote regions of the world, there are tribes and minorities who still live in their traditional ways in the midst of other cultures. All too often such peoples are despised and ignored by the nations among whom they dwell, but we should seek them out, teach them the Cause of God, and enrich through their membership the Bahá'í communities of the lands in which they live. So important is this goal that each National Spiritual Assembly should study the requirements for teaching each of the different tribes and groups within its area, appoint a committee for this purpose—even a special committee for each tribe or minority where this is feasible and desirable—and launch a series of well-conceived, far-reaching campaigns to bring about the enrollment of these peoples within the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and the establishment among them of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

### **Pioneering**

Great challenges and opportunities for teaching often occur far from large well-established Bahá'í communities; this is especially true in respect of many of the tribal peoples. Pioneering and travel teaching are therefore of the greatest importance for the accomplishment of teaching plans. It is not always difficult to see what the ideal solution for any particular teaching problem may be; however, ideal solutions are seldom available, and the Assemblies which achieve the most outstanding results are those which have developed the skill of using to their best advantage whatever means they have at their command and whatever assistance can be given to them. Pioneers, for example, all have different capacities, different skills, different problems and different responsibilities. A National Assembly may see that its most urgent need is for a financially independent married couple who can live in a remote village area to conduct regular classes for the believers there; but what it actually receives are two single middle-aged ladies who need to work to support themselves and can only get jobs in one of the large towns. Instead of despairing, a resourceful Assembly will immediately see whether the presence of either or both of these ladies in such a town would enable one or more native believers to pioneer to the village area. Even if this does not work

out, it will nevertheless do all it can to assist the two pioneers to settle down and will make the utmost use of whatever services they can render, services which may well, in the long run, be of inestimable benefit to that national community.

There are several ways of pioneering, and all are entirely valid and are of great help to the teaching work. There is, first of all, the pioneer who goes to a particular country, devotes the remainder of his life to the service of the Faith in that land and finally lays his bones to rest in its soil. Secondly, there is the pioneer who goes to a post, serves valiantly there until the native Bahá'í community is strongly established, and then moves on to new fields of service. Thirdly, there are those, for example youth between the completion of their schooling and the starting of their chosen profession, who go pioneering for a specific limited period.

Ideally, of course, a pioneer should be, or become as soon as possible, financially independent of the Fund in his chosen post, not only to husband the financial resources of the Faith but because it is a Bahá'í principle that everyone should work and support himself and his family whenever possible, and there is no such profession as pioneer or teacher in the Bahá'í Faith as there are professional missionaries and clergymen in other religions. Nevertheless it must be recognized that in some posts where pioneers are desperately needed there is no possibility for them to get work. Either there is no work available in the area or else the pioneer is refused a work permit because he is a foreigner. In such cases it is essential for the Assemblies to provide financial assistance to support the pioneer for as long as is necessary.

There are a number of methods of financing pioneers in areas where work is unobtainable. Believers can be found who have independent means and are willing to pioneer to the area and live on whatever income they have, however slender. There are those who, in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, have been deputized by friends who are unable to go themselves. Believers may be found who are willing to go to such an area for a specific period supported by the meager budget that the Fund can afford, with the clear understanding that at the end of that period they will return from the pioneer post and become self-supporting again; in such a way an area can be serviced with a succession of pioneers. Then there are those believers who are willing to serve in a remote and inhospitable area, but whose age or situation makes it clear from the outset that they will not be able to become self-supporting again; when the need is great and cannot be met in any other way, an Assembly would be fully justified in supporting them, but it should realize from the outset the extent of the responsibility it is incurring for an indefinite period into the future.

Naturally these ways of financing pioneering are not mutually exclusive. A person, for example, can be partially self-supporting and assisted to only a limited degree; or a pioneer may go to an area with the intention of finding work but is unable to do so and the Assembly repeatedly extends the period of financial support until the time comes when he is no longer able to become self-supporting anywhere. In such a case the Assembly needs to watch the process very carefully so that, on the one hand, it does not incur a permanent responsibility it had not intended, and on the other, does not commit the injustice of terminating the financial support extended to a pioneer at a time when he has become unemployable, and is unable to obtain any other means of support.

## **Traveling Teaching**

While pioneers provide a very valuable long-term reinforcement of a community and are often the only feasible means for opening new areas—and here we are speaking not only of pioneers from foreign lands but of homefront pioneers as well, the use of whom must be greatly developed in most countries—a second vital reinforcement of the work is provided by traveling teachers. As mentioned in the message sent to all believers at Riḍván, a new international travel teaching program is now being launched. National Assemblies and their committees, therefore, need to develop a threefold integrated program for travel teaching. Firstly, there should be within each national community regular circuits of local traveling teachers, that is to say of believers who are members of that national community, whether native or pioneers, who are able and willing to devote time to this activity. Secondly, and integrated within these circuits, provision should be made for planned visits of traveling teachers from abroad. Thirdly, each National Assembly should establish an agency and a procedure for taking advantage of the unheralded arrival of visitors from abroad, or of sudden offers from believers on the homefront, who would be able to give valuable help in the fields of travel teaching or proclamation if properly organized. Such an agency would, of course, be responsible for evaluating the capacity of those who offer services because while an unexpected offer can often provide a very valuable teaching opportunity, it is also true to say that some Bahá'í communities have been exhausted and their work hindered by the arrival of a succession of traveling Bahá'ís who were not really suited, for lack of a language or for other reasons, to assist with teaching in the area concerned. Friends who travel spontaneously in this way can do valuable teaching themselves but should not expect the assistance of local administrative institutions if they have not arranged the trip in advance.

## **Correspondence Courses**

Only a few National Spiritual Assemblies have been given the specific goal of developing and conducting correspondence courses; however, those National Assemblies who have the goal of training selected believers to assist in consolidating local communities would find it worthwhile to consider how the use of correspondence courses could help in the fulfillment of this goal. For example, once the selection of trainees has been made, the first stage in their training could well be a correspondence deepening course which would ascertain the degree of interest and capacity of each trainee and also prepare him to attend a series of lectures or classes which would follow as a second stage. The entire training process could consist of several stages interspersed in this way. This combination of two methods has the advantage of helping the Assembly to ascertain at the outset which trainees have the capacity and desire to continue with the course, thus leading to a better selection and helping to ensure that the costs of holding classes and bringing trainees to them are incurred only in respect of those whose interest and capacity have been established.

Economy can be exercised by holding the deepening classes in smaller gatherings by grouping several neighboring local communities together and sending one or more teachers to the area. This might prove more economical than inviting the selected trainees to, say, the capital, and having to accommodate and feed them during the period of the course.

## **Teaching Conferences**

Teaching Conferences can have a great value for the advance of the Faith. Their aim is to strengthen the bonds of unity and fellowship among the friends, to increase their involvement in the teaching work and their interest in its progress, and to serve as magnets to attract divine confirmations. They are also rallying points for the believers, evidences of the vitality of their love for Bahá'u'lláh, and potent instruments for generating enthusiasm and spiritual drive for advancing the interests of the Faith.

Certain National Spiritual Assemblies, which are not among the majority who are already doing so, have been assigned the goal of holding at least one National Teaching Conference during each year. The purpose of this is to provide a national event of major importance in addition to the annual National Convention to stimulate the interest and reorientate the efforts of the friends, focusing their attention upon the current urgent needs of the Plan. These National Teaching Conferences should, therefore, be held some months away from Ridván, or they will lose a great part of the intended effect.

As the eight International Conferences will soon be upon us, it is important for National Assemblies to decide as soon as possible, in consultation with the Counselors, whether it would be feasible and helpful to hold a national conference soon after, or possibly immediately before, the International Conference nearest to their area. The sooner this study is made and decisions taken and announced, the greater will be the participation of the friends, locally and from abroad.

## **Newsletters**

Although during the past year a marked improvement has been noticed in certain countries in the standard and regularity of the Bahá'í newsletters, the development of this organ of Bahá'í communication still needs great attention in most national communities. A special committee should be appointed, on which members of the National Spiritual Assembly could well serve, with the task of making the national newsletter a powerful instrument of direct and regular contact with the friends, which will disseminate news among them, stimulate and maintain their interest in the growth of the Faith in the world and throughout the area of national jurisdiction, share with them the National Spiritual Assembly's plans, hopes and aspirations, convey to them its comments on Bahá'í developments of special significance, and cause the believers to anticipate the future with feelings of excitement and confidence. The doors of communication between the friends, the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly should always be open. The one means which will contribute most to the promotion of this open-door policy is the regular issue of an interesting and heartwarming newsletter. In certain countries, we are glad to see, there are in addition to the national newsletter, news bulletins issued on regional or district levels. The importance of these secondary organs of Bahá'í communication acquires added weight in areas where differences of language make the issue of bulletins in a local language of each area highly desirable, if not essential.

## **Literature**



When each National Spiritual Assembly carefully compares the demands of the waiting public and the needs of the believers for Bahá'í literature with the current supply, it will realize how urgent is the need for it to multiply its efforts to ensure that a comprehensive range of our literature is made constantly available. The basic literature of the Faith must be translated into languages that are most suitable and in demand for the spread and development of the Faith in accordance with the goals of the Plan. In each national area the agencies for obtaining and disseminating Bahá'í literature should be greatly strengthened so that they will efficiently ensure an uninterrupted supply of the literature which is available from the various Publishing Trusts and organize its distribution throughout the area, through Local Assemblies and groups, by sale at conferences and summer schools, and directly to individuals. At the same time these agencies should ensure that the monies received from the sale of literature are kept separate from other funds of the Faith and are used for the replenishment of stocks of books and the widening of the range of literature available. National Assemblies must also give consideration to the need to cover the cost of certain literature out of the National Fund, so that it can be supplied free or sold at a price within the reach of those who urgently require it.

### **Radio and Television**

A compilation has recently been made from the letters written on behalf of the Guardian and a copy is attached for your information. This brief compilation shows the importance that Shoghi Effendi attached to the use of radio as a means of teaching and proclaiming the Faith in countries where such activity is possible.

The Universal House of Justice has initiated a pilot project in Ecuador for the purchase and operation of a Bahá'í radio station, and at the present time this is the only one for which sufficient funds are available. However, the actual owning of a radio station is not the only way of making use of this medium. National Spiritual Assemblies responsible for countries where Bahá'í radio programs would raise no objection from the civil authorities, should regard it as their bounden duty to explore, if they have not already done so, whatever options are open to them to utilize radio to sow the seeds of the Faith as widely as they can and to broadcast its divine teachings, as well as to assist in the consolidation of the local Bahá'í communities.

Where the use of television broadcasts is open to Bahá'í communities they should also take the utmost advantage of this opportunity.

### **Contact with the Authorities**

The events of the past year have demonstrated clearly that the enemies of the Faith are intensifying their attacks on the precious Cause of God. The Five Year Plan calls for a planned and sustained effort, under the close supervision of each National Spiritual Assembly, to foster cordial relations with responsible government officials and prominent people. In every country where the doors of contact with those in authority are open to the friends, the National Spiritual Assembly should, as indicated in our letter of Naw-Rúz 131, appoint a special committee to be given the task of finding effective ways of informing the authorities about the Faith, of dispelling any misgivings and of removing any misapprehensions which may be deceitfully created by those who are striving to extinguish the fire of God's Faith. We cannot

overemphasize the necessity of this activity and the need to use utmost tact and wisdom in pursuing it, for, not only will it facilitate the further proclamation and recognition of the Faith, but, as opposition to and misconceptions about the aims and purposes of the Bahá'ís increase, when a moment of crisis arrives the institutions of the Faith may know where to turn, whose advice and assistance to seek and how to minimize the effects of opposition.

Closely linked with the above undertaking, in countries where the Faith is not yet recognized, is the need to apply for such recognition if the laws of the country permit and if The Universal House of Justice has approved that an approach be made to the authorities on the subject. In other countries where some measure of recognition, such as the incorporation of Assemblies, has been obtained, National Spiritual Assemblies should be alert to the possibilities which are open to them to widen the scope and broaden the base of the recognition obtained for Bahá'í institutions, the Bahá'í marriage certificate and Bahá'í Holy Days. These measures will not only secure for the Faith a higher degree of legal protection, but will enhance its stature in the eyes of the authorities and the general public.

### **Wisdom in the Use of Bahá'í Funds**

The Five Year Plan emphasizes the obligation of the friends, in view of the growing needs of the Faith to ensure that a generous outpouring of contributions is offered in support of Bahá'í Funds, and encourages Bahá'í communities at present dependent on outside help to aim at becoming self-supporting. While all National Spiritual Assemblies have the obligation to administer Bahá'í funds wisely and judiciously, those National Spiritual Assemblies which depend to a large extent on budgetary assistance from the World Center have an even greater responsibility, so to speak, to carefully supervise expenditures. The more rigorous the exercise of economy on the part of National Spiritual Assemblies, the sooner will the body of the friends be encouraged to feel financial responsibility toward the progress of the Faith in their areas, to place greater reliance upon the wise administration of the National Spiritual Assembly, and to offer their resources, however modest they may be, for the furthering of its plans and activities.

National Spiritual Assemblies must uphold economy not only because the funds at their disposal are limited but, as experience has repeatedly shown, because lack of proper control and supervision in the expenditure of these funds is both an unfair temptation to the untrustworthy and a test to the body of the believers, causing them to become disenchanted with Bahá'í administration and weakening their resolve to fulfill their sacred obligation of contributing to the Fund.

In the attitudes seen at the National Office, in the appropriations made to committees and other agencies of the National Assembly, in any budgetary assistance given to pioneers and traveling teachers, in the holding of conferences and deepening courses, and in all aspects of the work of the Cause for which the National Assembly is responsible, supervision, careful planning and lack of extravagance should be observed and be seen to be upheld.

### **Local Spiritual Assemblies**

It is becoming increasingly understood by the friends why the Five Year Plan places such great emphasis upon the firmness of the foundation and the efficiency of the operation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. This is very heartening, for upon the degree to which the members of these Assemblies grasp the true significance of the divine institution on which they serve, arise selflessly to fulfill their prescribed and sacred duties, and persevere in their endeavors, depends to a large extent the healthy growth of the worldwide community of the Most Great Name, the force of its outward thrust, and the strength of its supporting roots.

We long to see every Local Spiritual Assembly either spontaneously adopt its own goals or warmly welcome those it has been or will be given by its National Spiritual Assembly, swell the number of the adherents who compose its local community and, guided by the general policy outlined by its National Spiritual Assembly, proclaim the Faith more effectively, energetically pursue its extension teaching and consolidation goals, arrange the observances of the Holy Days, regularly hold its Nineteen Day Feasts and its sessions for deepening, initiate and maintain community projects, and encourage the participation of every member of its community in giving to the Fund and undertaking teaching activities and administrative services, so as to make each locality a stronghold of the Faith and a torchbearer of the Covenant.

We are confident that the institution of the Boards of Counselors will lend its vital support and, through the Counselors' own contacts with the friends, through their Auxiliary Boards and their assistants, will nourish the roots of each local community, enrich and cultivate the soil of knowledge of the teachings and irrigate it with the living waters of love for Bahá'u'lláh. Thus will the saplings grow into mighty trees, and the trees bear their golden fruit.

### **Women**

'Abdu'l-Bahá has pointed out that "Among the miracles which distinguish this sacred dispensation is this, that women have evinced a greater boldness than men when enlisted in the ranks of the Faith." Shoghi Effendi has further stated that this "boldness" must, in the course of time, "be more convincingly demonstrated, and win for the beloved Cause victories more stirring than any it has as yet achieved." Although obviously the entire Bahá'í world is committed to encouraging and stimulating the vital role of women in the Bahá'í community as well as in society at large, the Five Year Plan calls specifically on eighty National Spiritual Assemblies to organize Bahá'í activities for women. In the course of the current year which has been designated "International Women's Year" as a worldwide activity of the United Nations, the Bahá'ís, particularly in these eighty national communities, should initiate and implement programs which will stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá'í community life, so that through their accomplishments the friends will demonstrate the distinction of the Cause of God in this field of human endeavor.

### **Youth**

It is our hope that in the international travel teaching program now being launched the youth will assume a major role by devoting time during their vacations, and particularly during the long vacation at the end of

the academic year, to the promotion of the teaching work in all its aspects, not only within their own national communities but farther afield. Some youth may have financial resources of their own, others may be able and willing to work and save the funds necessary for such projects, still others may have the financial backing of their parents, relatives or friends. In other cases the Bahá'í funds may be able to supplement whatever resources the prospective traveling teacher may be able to supply.

The endurance of youth under arduous conditions, their vitality and vigor, and their ability to adapt themselves to local situations, to meet new challenges, and to impart their warmth and enthusiasm to those they visit, combined with the standard of conduct upheld by Bahá'í youth, make them potent instruments for the execution of the contemplated projects. Indeed, through these distinctive qualities they can become the spearhead of any enterprise and the driving force of any undertaking in which they participate, whether local or national. Our expectant eyes are fixed on Bahá'í youth!

### **Children**

How often have well-organized Bahá'í children's classes given parents, even those who are not Bahá'ís, the incentive to learn more and study more deeply the Teachings of the Faith! How often have the children, through their songs and recitation of prayers during Feasts and at other gatherings of the friends, added luster and inspiration to the program and created a true sense of belonging to the community in the hearts of those present! How many are the children who have grown into active and enkindled youth, and later into wholly dedicated adults, energetically supporting the work of the Cause and advancing its vital interests!

Certain National Spiritual Assemblies have been given the specific goal of organizing children's activities, and many of these Assemblies have been assigned assistance in the form of at least one helper who will have received some training in the education of Bahá'í children. The National Assemblies to receive such helpers, however, should not await their arrival before initiating activities. Through the services of a committee chosen from among those interested in this area of service, simple lessons could be improvised, suitable extracts from the Writings and Prayers chosen for the children to study and memorize, and local talent called upon to carry out this vital activity which will assuredly exert a far-reaching influence on the well-being and strength of each community.

### **Dawn Prayers**

We have been watching with profound interest the manner in which the goal of encouraging the friends to meet for dawn prayers is being carried out. In some rural areas this has become already an established practice of the friends and indeed a source of blessing and benefit to them as they pursue their activities during the day, as well as increasing the consciousness of community solidarity. In other areas, the friends have found that, because of the distances involved, better results are obtained by meeting for prayer in smaller groups. In yet other areas, as a first step, plans have been made to meet for dawn prayers once a week.

May the Blessed Beauty sustain you bountifully as you prepare yourselves to discharge the commitments and surmount the challenges of the year which has just begun.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

### **Use of Radio and Television in Teaching**

Extracts from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

In regard to your wish of broadcasting the Message, Shoghi Effendi would advise you to consult with the Spiritual Assembly as to whether such an action meets their approval, and if so to ask their assistance and help for finding the best means through which to carry out your plan. The idea of a wireless station is rather ambitious and requires much financial expenditure. If, however, you find it feasible and within your financial capacity you should not hesitate to do so, inasmuch as this will enable you to spread the Cause in a much easier and more efficient manner.

(13 August 1933 to an individual believer)

Your suggestion regarding the installation of a radio station in the Temple is truly splendid. But it remains to be seen whether the National Spiritual Assembly finds it financially feasible to undertake such a project, which is, beyond doubt, a very costly enterprise. Whatever the expenditure involved in this project, there is no reason why the believers should not start now considering seriously the possibility of such a plan, which, when carried out and perfected, can lend an unprecedented impetus to the expansion of the teaching work throughout America.

It is for the National Spiritual Assembly, however, to take the final decision in this matter, and to determine whether the national fund of the Cause is at present sufficiently strong to permit them to install a radio station in the Temple.

The Guardian feels, nevertheless, confident that this plan will receive the careful consideration of the National Spiritual Assembly members, and hopes that, if feasible, they will take some definite action in this matter.

(31 January 1937 to an individual believer)

He read with interest the various suggestions you made to the National Spiritual Assembly, and feels they are fundamentally sound, especially the wider use of the radio. Unfortunately at the present time anything that would make a fresh demand on the financial resources of the Cause in America—such as a Bahá'í-owned broadcasting station—is out of the question, as the friends are finding it difficult to meet the great needs of the teaching and Temple Funds. However the idea should, he feels, be kept in mind for future realization.

(14 October 1942 to an individual believer)

In connection with the radio work ... he would suggest that the main consideration is to bring to the attention of the public the fact that the Faith exists, and its teachings. Every kind of broadcast, whether of passages from the Writings, or on topical subjects, or lectures, should be used. The people need to hear the word "Bahá'í" so that they can, if receptive, respond and seek the Cause out. The primary duty of the friends everywhere in the world is to let the people know such a Revelation is in existence; their next duty is to teach it.

(24 July 1943 to an individual believer)

He feels it would be excellent if the Cause could be introduced more to the people through the medium of radio, as it reaches the masses, especially those who do not take an interest in lectures or attend any type of meeting.

(7 March 1945 to an individual believer)

The matter of obtaining free time on the radio is one which the Radio Committee and the National Spiritual Assembly must decide upon: but the principle is that every effort should be made to present the teachings over the air as often as possible as long as the manner in which it is done is compatible with the dignity of our beloved Faith.

(15 August 1945 to an individual believer)

He was sorry to learn through your cable that the project for a Bahá'í radio station can not be carried out at present; he considers that such a station would be a very great asset to the Cause, not only as a teaching medium and a wonderful form of publicity, but also as an enhancement of its prestige. He feels your Assembly should not drop the matter, but go on investigating ways to make such a project materialize as soon as possible.

(20 March 1946 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

He hopes that a Bahá'í radio station will prove feasible during the coming years, as he considers it of great importance.

(4 May 1946 to the Radio Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

The Bahá'ís should not always be the last to take up new and obviously excellent methods, but rather the first, as this agrees with the dynamic nature of the Faith which is not only progressive, but holds within itself the seeds of an entirely new culture and civilization.

(5 May 1946 to an individual believer)

The Guardian approves in principle of a radio station, and sees no objection to its being in the Temple; but he considers the cost you quote too much of a burden at the present time for the Fund to bear, in view of the multiple expenses of the new Seven Year Plan. If there is any way it can be done for a price you feel the

Fund could pay, and which would be more reasonable, he approves of your doing it. In any case the National Spiritual Assembly should strongly press for recognition as a Religious Body, and claim full rights to be represented on the air on an equal footing with other established Churches.

(20 July 1946 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

He approves of your desire to teach the principles of the Faith through radio. But he urges you to do all you can to always, however small the reference you are able to make to it may be, clearly identify or associate what you are giving out with Bahá'u'lláh. The time is too short now for us Bahá'ís to be able to first educate humanity and then tell it that the Source is this new World Faith. For their own spiritual protection people must hear of the name Bahá'í—then, if they turn blindly away, they cannot excuse themselves by saying they never even knew it existed! For dark days seem still ahead of the world, and outside of this Divine Refuge the people will not, we firmly believe, find inner conviction, peace and security. So they have a right to at least hear of the Cause as such!

(24 April 1949 to an individual believer)

5 June 1975

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the Five Year Plan gathers momentum in all parts of the world, with the followers of the Blessed Perfection firmly embarked on the course that will lead to victory, the time has come for us to contemplate, in preparation for its imminent initiation, the project which will rank as the greatest single undertaking of that Plan, the construction of a befitting seat for The Universal House of Justice in the heart of God's Holy Mountain.

Nearly thirty-six years ago, after overcoming a multitude of difficulties, the beloved Guardian succeeded in transferring to Mount Carmel the sacred remains of the Purest Branch and Navváb, interring them in the immediate neighborhood of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and alluded, in these words, to the "capital institutional significance" that these events constituted in the unfoldment of the World Center of the Faith:

For it must be clearly understood, nor can it be sufficiently emphasized, that the conjunction of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf with those of her brother and mother incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the wings of the Báb's overshadowing Sepulcher, and in the vicinity of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár which will be reared on its flank, is destined to evolve into the focal center of those world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and which are to function in consonance with the principles that govern the twin institutions of the Guardianship and The Universal House of Justice. Then, and then only, will this momentous prophecy which illuminates the concluding passages of the Tablet of Carmel be fulfilled: "Erelong will God sail His Ark upon thee (Carmel), and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names."

To attempt to visualize, even in its barest outline, the glory that must envelop these institutions, to essay even a tentative and partial description of their character or the manner of their operation, or to trace however inadequately the course of events leading to their rise and eventual establishment is far beyond my own capacity and power. Suffice it to say that at this troubled stage in world history the association of these three incomparably precious souls who, next to the three Central Figures of our Faith, tower in rank above the vast multitude of the heroes, Letters, martyrs, hands, teachers and administrators of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, in such a potentially powerful spiritual and administrative Center, is in itself an event which will release forces that are bound to hasten the emergence in a land



which, geographically, spiritually and administratively, constitutes the heart of the entire planet, of some of the brightest gems of that World Order now shaping in the womb of this travelling age.

The first of the majestic edifices constituting this mighty Center, was the building for the International Archives of the Faith which was completed in the summer of 1957 as one of the last major achievements of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship and which set the style for the remaining structures which, as described by him, were to be raised in the course of time in the form of a far-flung arc on the slope of Mount Carmel. In the eighteen years since that achievement, the community of the Most Great Name has grown rapidly in size and influence: from twenty-six National Spiritual Assemblies to one hundred and nineteen, from some one thousand to seventeen thousand Local Spiritual Assemblies, and from four thousand five hundred localities to over seventy thousand, accompanied by a corresponding increase in the volume of the work carried on at the World Center of the Faith and in the complexity of its institutions. It is now both necessary and possible to initiate construction of a building that will not only serve the practical needs of a steadily consolidating administrative center but will, for centuries to come, stand as a visible expression of the majesty of the divinely ordained institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Faced, like the Archives Building, with stone from Italy, and surrounded by a stately colonnade of sixty Corinthian columns, the seat for The Universal House of Justice will contain, in addition to the council chamber of the House of Justice, a library, a concourse for the reception of pilgrims and dignitaries, storage vaults with air purification for the preservation of original Tablets and other precious documents, accommodation for the secretariat and the many ancillary services that will be required. Conceived in a style of enduring beauty and majesty, and faced with stone that will weather the centuries, the building in its interior arrangements will be very simple and capable of adaptation in the generations ahead to whatever technological advances will be made by the rapid growth of human knowledge.

The erection of this building which, comprising five and a half stories, far surpasses in size and complexity any building at present in existence at the World Center presents a major challenge to the Bahá'í community, whose resources are already all too meager in relation to the great tasks that lie before it. But the spirit of sacrifice has been the hallmark of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh of every race and clime and as they unite to raise this second of the great edifices of the Administrative Center of their Faith they will rejoice at having the inestimable privilege of taking part in a "vast and irresistible process" which Shoghi Effendi stated is "unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind," a process "which will synchronize with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions—the one outside and the other within the Bahá'í world—will attain its final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith, through the raising of the standard of the Most Great Peace, and the emergence, in the plenitude of its power and glory, of the focal Center of the agencies constituting the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh."

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

24 July 1975

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 16 March 1975 has been received and we have studied the various questions arising from your study of the *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*...

Concerning your questions about the equality of men and women, this, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has often explained, is a fundamental principle of Bahá'u'lláh; therefore the Laws of the Aqdas should be studied in the light of it. Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions. In some things women excel men, for others men are better fitted than women, while in very many things the difference of sex is of no effect at all. The differences of function are most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching implications which are recognized in Bahá'í Law. For example, when it is not possible to educate all one's children, daughters receive preference over sons, as mothers are the first educators of the next generation. Again, for physiological reasons, women are granted certain exemptions from fasting that are not applicable to men.

You mention the provision in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas regarding inheritance, in which the eldest son receives preferential treatment. As you no doubt know, the duty of making a will is enjoined upon all Bahá'ís, and in such a will a believer is free to bequeath his or her property in whatever way he or she wishes (see note 25 on page 60 of the *Synopsis and Codification*). Every system of law, however, needs to make provision for the disposal of a person's property if he or she dies without having made a will, and it is in cases of intestacy that the specific provisions stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applied. These provisions give expression to the law of primogeniture, which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, has invariably been upheld by the Law of God. In a Tablet to a follower of the Faith in Persia He wrote: "In all the Divine Dispensations the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." With the distinctions given to the eldest son, however, go concomitant duties. For example, with respect to the law of inheritance 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained in one of His Tablets that the eldest son has the responsibility to take into consideration the needs of the other heirs. Similar considerations no doubt apply to the provisions that, in intestacy, limit the shares due to half-brothers and half-sisters of the deceased on his or her mother's side; they will, of course, be due to receive inheritance from their own father's estate.

Your statement that "Gifts to a wife are included in the man's property to be given away after his death" is incorrect. It is clear from the passage in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that certain things that a husband buys for his wife are intended to be for the general household and certain are intended to be the wife's personal

property. These latter, that is to say the wife's used clothing and gifts which have been made to her, are *not* included in the husband's property.

The husband's duty to send his wife home if differences arise between them while traveling is a part of the law of divorce, and relates to the husband's obligation to support his wife during the year of waiting. The *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* reads as follows (at section (g) on pages 42 and 43):

Should differences arise between husband and wife while traveling, he is required to send her home, or entrust her to a dependable person, who will escort her there, paying her journey and her full year's expenses.

You have also asked for an explanation of why, in view of the Bahá'í principle of equality of men and women, women are not allowed to serve on The Universal House of Justice. We share with you the following passages about this subject, taken from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly and to an individual believer.

As regards the membership of the International House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in a Tablet that it is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be revealed as manifest as the sun in the future. In any case the believers should know that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explicitly stated that sexes are equal except in some cases, the exclusion of women from the International House of Justice should not be surprising. From the fact that there is no equality of functions between the sexes one should not, however, infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights.—14 December 1940

Regarding your question, the Master said the wisdom of having no women on the International House of Justice would become manifest in the future. We have no other indication than this.—17 September 1952

We must always remember Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation, which is quoted on page 22 of the *Synopsis and Codification*: "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it."

It is hoped that the foregoing will be helpful to your own understanding of the matters about which you have asked.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

18 March 1976

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

ANNOUNCE DELEGATES ASSEMBLED NATIONAL CONVENTIONS GLAD TIDINGS COMPLETION EXCAVATION MOUNT CARMEL PREPARATORY RAISING MAJESTIC CENTER LEGISLATION GOD'S FAITH THAT SACRED SPOT, SIGNATURE ITALY FIVE AND HALF MILLION DOLLAR CONTRACT FOR SUPPLYING OVER TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED CUBIC METERS 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 CENTER PARALLELED FURTHER UNFOLDMENT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE CONTINENTAL NATIONAL LEVELS THROUGH RAISING NUMBER CONTINENTAL COUNSELORS TO SIXTY-ONE BY APPOINTMENT THELMA KHELGHATI WESTERN AFRICA, WILLIAM MASEHLA SOUTHERN AFRICA, BURHÁNÍ'D-DÍN AFSHÍN SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA, HIDEYA SUZUKI NORTHEASTERN ASIA, OWEN BATTRICK AUSTRALASIA AND ADIB TAHERZADEH EUROPE, AUTHORIZATION BOARDS COUNSELORS APPOINT NINETY MORE MEMBERS AUXILIARY BOARDS, AND CALL FOR ELECTION AT RIḌVÁN 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-À-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 TRAVELING 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 CENTER CONSTITUTING GREAT ACCESSION STRENGTH WORLD CENTER 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 LABORERS 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.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

24 March 1976

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As you will have seen in the Convention message, The Universal House of Justice has appointed six new Counselors and has authorized the appointment of ninety more Auxiliary Board members.

On the instruction of the House of Justice we now enclose for your information a complete list of the members of the Continental Boards of Counselors following the above appointments, and a list of the Auxiliary Boards showing the increases.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONTINENTAL BOARDS OF COUNSELORS—MARCH 1976

**AFRICA**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Northern Africa       | Muḥammad Kebdani, Muḥammad Muṣṭafá, 'Imád Šábirán                                  |
| Western Africa        | Ḥusayn Ardikání, Friday Ekpe, Zekrullah Kazemi, Thelma Khelghati, Mihdí Samandarí  |
| Central & East Africa | Hushang Ahdieh, Oloro Epyeru, Kolonario Oule, Isobel Sabri, Peter Vuyiya           |
| Southern Africa       | Seewoosumbur-Jeehoba Appa, Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, William Masehla, Bahíyyih Winckler |

**WESTERN  
HEMISPHERE**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| North America   | Lloyd Gardner, Sarah Pereira, Velma Sherrill, Edna True  |
| Central America | Carmen de Burafato, Rowland Estall, Artemus Lamb, Paul Lucas, Alfred Osborne                     |
| South America   | Leonora Armstrong, Athos Costas, Mas'úd <u>K</u> hamsí, Peter McLaren, Raúl Pavón, Donald Witzel |

**ASIA**

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Western Asia       | Íraj Ayman, Masiḥ Farhangí, Ḥádí Raḥmání, Manú <u>ch</u> ihr Salmánpúr                                    |
| South Central Asia | Burhání'd-Dín Af <u>sh</u> ín, Shirin Boman, Salisa Kermani, Dipchand Khianra, Zena Sorabjee              |
| Northeastern Asia  | Richard Benson, Elena Marsella, Rúḥu'lláh Mumtází, Hideya Suzuki  |
| Southeastern Asia  | Yan Kee Leong, Firaydún Míth <u>á</u> qíyán, <u>K</u> hudáraḥm Paymán, Vicente Samaniego, Chellie Sundram |

**AUSTRALASIA**

Suhayl 'Alá'í, Owen Battrick, Howard Harwood, Violet Hoehnke, Thelma Perks

**EUROPE**

Erik Blumenthal, Anneliese Bopp, Dorothy Ferraby, Louis Hénuzet, Betty Reed, Adib Taherzadeh

AUXILIARY BOARDS—RIDVÁN 1976

|  | Former | Present  | New   |
|--|--------|----------|-------|
|  | Number | Increase | Total |

**Africa**

Protection:

|                  |    |   |    |
|------------------|----|---|----|
| Northern         | 5  | - | 5  |
| Western          | 5  | 6 | 11 |
| Central and East | 13 | - | 13 |
| Southern         | 4  | 3 | 7  |
|                  | 27 |   | 36 |

Propagation:

|                  |    |   |    |
|------------------|----|---|----|
| Northern         | 5  | - | 5  |
| Western          | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| Central and East | 19 | - | 19 |
| Southern         | 10 | 6 | 16 |
|                  | 45 |   | 54 |

**Western Hemisphere**

Protection:

|                 |    |   |    |
|-----------------|----|---|----|
| North America   | 9  | - | 9  |
| Central America | 9  | 2 | 11 |
| South America   | 9  | 7 | 16 |
|                 | 27 |   | 36 |

Propagation:

|                 |    |   |    |
|-----------------|----|---|----|
| North America   | 18 | - | 18 |
| Central America | 9  | 7 | 16 |



|               |    |    |    |
|---------------|----|----|----|
| South America | 27 | 11 | 38 |
|               | 54 |    | 72 |

### Asia

#### Protection:

|               |    |   |    |
|---------------|----|---|----|
| Western       | 9  | - | 9  |
| South Central | 3  | 3 | 6  |
| Northeastern  | 3  | - | 3  |
| Southeastern  | 3  | 6 | 9  |
|               | 18 |   | 27 |

#### Propagation:

|               |    |    |    |
|---------------|----|----|----|
| Western       | 18 | -  | 18 |
| South Central | 15 | 15 | 30 |
| Northeastern  | 15 | -  | 15 |
| Southeastern  | 15 | 12 | 27 |
|               | 63 |    | 90 |

### Australasia

|              |   |   |    |
|--------------|---|---|----|
| Protection:  | 9 | - | 9  |
| Propagation: | 9 | 9 | 18 |

### Europe

|             |   |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| Protection: | 9 | - | 9 |
|-------------|---|---|---|

|                          |            |           |            |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Propagation:             | 27         | -         | 27         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>288</b> | <b>90</b> | <b>378</b> |
| <b>Total Protection</b>  | <b>90</b>  | <b>27</b> | <b>117</b> |
| <b>Total Propagation</b> | <b>198</b> | <b>63</b> | <b>261</b> |

July 1976

To the Friends assembled at the International Teaching Conference in Anchorage

Dearly loved Friends,

Sixty years ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá summoned the valiant North American believers to open the remote and inhospitable regions which form the climatic frontiers of the Arctic and the sub-Arctic. The full implementation of His wish had to be postponed for some years, until, under the leadership of His beloved grandson, well-grounded administrative bases were established from which Bahá'í crusaders could set out in conquest of these prized and virgin lands.

As early as 1915, however, we see a first wave of itinerant teachers and short-time settlers directing their steps towards Alaska in an attempt to open it to the light of Bahá'u'lláh. This was followed by a second wave of determined pioneers and spiritual conquerors who, ever since the first Seven Year Plan, demonstrated their exemplary enthusiasm and caused "the breezes ... of the love of God" to "perfume the nostrils of the inhabitants" of that "vast country." In Canada, in response to the Master's call, a succession of homefront pioneers settled and opened the length and breadth of their land, so rich in promise "whether from a material or a spiritual standpoint," and whose destiny is to "become the object of the glance of Providence." To the fringes of Greenland North American and European pioneers brought the light of God's Faith, and provided the means for the fire of His love to be kindled in that land, in anticipation of the day when it will become "a divine rose garden and a heavenly paradise." Iceland, specifically mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, was opened and consolidated, and has, through the warm response of its inhabitants to the Call of God, undoubtedly become one of the shining beacons of the "lights of the Most Great Guidance" in the North.

As a result of these movements and organized activities, the call of the Kingdom reached "the ears of the Eskimos," and the divine spark was struck in their lands. Praise be to God, today there are many who justly belong to the rank of heroes from among that noble race, and whose hearts are burning with His love. Upon the zeal and endurance of these enkindled believers will depend the early fulfillment of the Master's glowing promises. The teaching work among the Indians of the northern lands of the Western Hemisphere has likewise borne rich fruit, as tribe upon tribe has been enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether in Alaska's southeastern islands and rugged mountains, or in Canada's huge Indian reserves from the west to the east, many Amerindian believers have arisen to serve the Cause, and through their joint efforts, their sacrificial endeavors and distinctive talents they bid fair to accelerate the dawn of the day when they will be so "illuminated as to enlighten the whole world."

Many are the goals which now challenge the peoples of the North under the Five Year Plan: encouraging and educating the children and stimulating and guiding the youth; a wider participation of women in Bahá'í services; a greater assumption by the indigenous inhabitants of these regions of responsibilities in the leadership and administration of the community; a bolder proclamation of the Faith by radio and television; and a more far-flung and intensified campaign of teaching, audaciously conceived by National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies and vigorously executed by Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers, aiming at a vast increase in the number of adherents to the Faith from every segment of society, a multiplication of Bahá'í administrative institutions, and a richer and more diverse range of publications in all media. What will set the seal on the success of the Plan and pave the way for the long-awaited and divinely promised glories of the future, is a mightier effort by every supporter of the Most Great Name in those climes to increasingly deepen themselves in the teachings, to pour forth their substance in the path of His love, to resolve to conform their personal lives to the high standards set in His teachings, and to undertake more daring tasks however great the sacrifice, and more extensive travels however arduous the voyage. In this wise will they draw nearer to the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh and become true and radiant signs of His Most Great Guidance. These are the tasks! This is the work!

We pray at the Sacred Threshold that the Bahá'ís of the North may in the not-too-distant future transform the Arctic into that spiritual rose garden and heavenly paradise longed and yearned for by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that its peoples may be bountifully blessed and lovingly guided in their selfless services to promote the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

July 1976

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the International Teaching Conference in Helsinki

Dearly loved Friends,

With eager hearts we hail the convocation of this first of the twin Arctic Conferences inaugurating the series of eight International Bahá'í Conferences to be held during the middle part of the Five Year Plan. The northern regions of the world were alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of this Revelation. Their names were recorded in the Tablets of the Divine Plan by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who, in one of His other Tablets, supplicated God to "raise up sanctified, pure and spiritual souls in the countries of the West and the territories of the North, and make them signs of His guidance, ensigns of the Concourse on High and angels of the Abhá Kingdom." These lands received the constant attention of Shoghi Effendi, who repeatedly urged the friends to carry the Faith to their uttermost inhabited areas, and who joyfully announced every advance of the Bahá'ís that established a center closer to the North Pole.

Already touched by the morning light of God's Cause by the nineteen-twenties, the lands of the North were blessed by visits from the indomitable Martha Root, whose love warmed and encouraged the hearts of the handful of believers then laboring in a few scattered centers in Scandinavia and illumined the soul of Hólmfríður Árnadóttir, Iceland's first Bahá'í. Bursting into blossom under the impact of the rays of the second Seven Year Plan, these communities received a major impetus from the Ten Year Crusade, of which the European campaign was launched at the never-to-be-forgotten conference in Stockholm in 1953, and which established centers as far north as Thule in Greenland and Sassen in the islands of Spitzbergen. Yet another stage of growth was reached with the Nine Year Plan and the convocation of the North Atlantic Conference in Reykjavik, which marked the opening of a new phase in the collaboration between the northern communities on both sides of that ocean.

Only thirty-eight years have passed since Väinö Rissanen, the first Bahá'í in Finland, accepted with radiant heart the life-giving message brought to him by Josephine Kruka, the "Mother of Finland," in July 1938, and now the city of Helsinki, the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Finland, is the scene of an International Bahá'í Conference whose deliberations are focused on the diffusion of the light of God's Faith throughout the entire arctic and subarctic regions of the world.

The followers of the Blessed Perfection gathered in Helsinki must direct their attention to the urgent tasks of the second half of the Five Year Plan: to the reopening of Spitzbergen; the winning of the 34 Local Spiritual Assemblies still to be formed in Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland; the acceleration of the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature; the forging of still closer links of

collaboration with the Bahá'í communities of Alaska, Canada and in the continent of Europe; the enlistment under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh of increasing numbers of the Eskimo, Lapp and Gypsy peoples; and the pursuit of the vital and challenging objectives of the Plan beyond the frontiers of their homelands.

It is our fervent prayer at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh that this Conference will produce an upsurge of Bahá'í activity throughout the northern lands and in the islands of the North Sea and the Baltic that will outshine every achievement made in those promising regions, and be an inspiration to your fellow-believers in every country of the world.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

7 July 1976

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter of May 15 conveying your thoughts on the need for Bahá'ís to become involved as may be necessary in political affairs and to participate in activities aimed at the eradication of injustice. The sincerity which prompted you to write such a letter and to candidly express your sentiments deeply touched The Universal House of Justice. We have been asked to convey its comments to you.

You ask if silence on the part of Bahá'ís will not allow chaos and human humiliation to be a permanent feature on earth, and state that shunning of politics by the Bahá'ís can but weaken the freedom fighters of the world. When viewing the conditions of our society we see a world beset by ills and groaning under the burden of suffering. This suffering, Bahá'u'lláh has Himself testified, is because the "body" of the world, "though created whole and perfect, has been afflicted, through divers causes, with grave ills and maladies," and "its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of unskilled physicians who have spurred on the steed of their worldly desires and have erred grievously." Bahá'u'lláh's statement in this passage concludes with the assertion that the "sovereign remedy" lies in turning and submitting to the "skilled," the "all-powerful," and "inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error."

This Divine Physician has assured us in His writings that God is All-Seeing and All-Knowing and has willed to establish in this Day and among men His everlasting Kingdom. "The whole earth," Bahá'u'lláh has stated, "is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings." In order to achieve this purpose God sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations, both of Whom the generality of mankind have rejected, and have, alas, preferred to continue in their own blindness and perversity. Commenting on such a world spectacle, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." "After a time," He further wrote, "all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm."

When we turn to His other writings to learn more of His warning that this "present-day order" is to be "rolled up," we read statements and predictions such as these: "The time for the destruction of the world

and its people hath arrived." "The hour is approaching when the most great convulsion will have appeared." "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!'" "Soon shall the blasts of His chastisement beat upon you and the dust of hell enshroud you." "And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake." "The day is approaching when its [civilization's] flame will devour the cities, when the Tongue of Grandeur will proclaim: 'The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Praised!'" "The day is approaching when the wrathful anger of the Almighty will have taken hold of them. He, verily, is the Omnipotent, the All-Subduing, the Most Powerful. He shall cleanse the earth from the defilement of their corruption, and shall give it for an heritage unto such of His servants as are nigh unto Him."

From the above it becomes clear that the Hand of Providence is at work, and is engaged in fulfilling God's purpose for mankind in this Age. "God's purpose," Shoghi Effendi assures us, "is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it."

Let us consider the First World War, which Shoghi Effendi has described in his writings as "the first stage in a titanic convulsion long predicted by Bahá'u'lláh." Although it ended outwardly in a Treaty of Peace, 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarked: "Peace, Peace, the lips of potentates and peoples unceasingly proclaim, whereas the fire of unquenched hatreds still smolders in their hearts." And then in 1920, He wrote: "The ills from which the world now suffers will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen." And again: "another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out." After this Second World War broke out in 1939, Shoghi Effendi called it a "tempest, unprecedented in its violence," and the "great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth." After the termination of this War and the creation of the United Nations, the Guardian wrote in 1948, anticipating "still more violent convulsions" and referred to the "wings of yet another conflict" destined to "darken the international horizon." And finally in his last Ridván Message of April 1957, he left for posterity the following analysis of world conditions in the light of the prophecies and predictions recorded in the writings of the Faith:

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.

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 four score 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 smoldering 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 ...

Thus we see how the Divine Physician is both the "Judge" of mankind and its "Redeemer."

This same Physician, addressing His followers, "the beloved of the one true God," wrote: "Forbear ye from concerning yourselves with the affairs of this world and all that pertaineth unto it, or from meddling with the activities of those who are its outward leaders. The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath bestowed the government of the earth upon the kings. To none is given the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority."

In another Tablet He laid on His followers the obligation to "behave towards the government of the country in which they reside with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness." 'Abdu'l-Bahá reaffirmed the same principles. When in America He explained: "The essence of the Bahá'í spirit is that, in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government." And in a Tablet He referred to the "irrefutable command that the Blessed Perfection hath given" in His Tablets, namely, "that the believers must obey the kings with the utmost sincerity and fidelity, and He hath forbidden them [the believers] to interfere at all with political problems. He hath even prohibited the believers from discussing political affairs."

And finally in His last Will and Testament He wrote: "We must obey and be the well-wishers of the government of the land ..."

We have also been asked to share with you at this juncture the following two extracts from letters written by The Universal House of Justice, and it is hoped these will help you in appreciating the significant and vital role Bahá'ís can and must play in the world today:

We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce in

God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body—of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace—is that of the Bahá'ís, who are laboring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellowmen, thus conferring upon them eternal life.

The working out of God's Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated. It is to this work that we must devote all our energies, for there is no one else to do it....

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... Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellowmen. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely-created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

You have asked whether it is possible to have a World Federation when not all countries have attained their independence. The answer is in the negative. Both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi likened the emergence of the American Republic and the unification of the “diversified and loosely related elements” of its “divided” community into one national entity, to the unity of the world and the incorporation of its federated units into “one coherent system.” Just as the American Constitution does not allow one state to be more autonomous than another, so must the nations of the world enjoy equal status in any form of World Federation. Indeed one of the “candles” of unity anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is “unity in freedom.”

Yet another question is whether it is morally right to remain silent when equality is being abused. The beloved Guardian has given us the following guidelines in letters written on his behalf. "Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations."

The Universal House of Justice hopes that you and your Bahá'í coworkers in that land will steep yourselves in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, endeavor to follow in your personal lives the noble standards set by Him, attract the multitudes to the radiance of His glorious Faith, and enable them to warm their hearts and ignite their souls with the flames of that undying Fire which "blazeth and rageth in the world of creation."

We have been asked by The Universal House of Justice to assure you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

August 1976

To the Friends assembled at the International Teaching Conference in Paris

Dearly loved Friends,

The brilliance of Paris in the story of European civilization bids fair to be renewed with even greater splendor during the Day of the Lord of Hosts and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The annals of Paris in this Day have already acquired eternal luster from events of mightier import, of greater universal significance and more sacred character than any which its past history has witnessed. The visits of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of God's inviolable Covenant, alone outshine in historical importance anything in the long history of France, and are immortalized in the greatly loved collection of His discourses given in that capital city. Beyond this, we recall with awe and pride that it was at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instruction that the illustrious May Maxwell succeeded in establishing in Paris the first Bahá'í center on the European Continent, a continent described by Shoghi Effendi as "the cradle of a civilization to some of whose beneficent features the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh has paid significant tribute; on whose soil both the Greek and Roman civilizations were born and flourished; which has contributed so richly to the unfoldment of American civilization; the fountainhead of American culture; the mother of Christendom, and the scene of the greatest exploits of the followers of Jesus Christ," and experiencing "the first stirrings of that spiritual revolution" which must culminate in the permanent establishment throughout its diversified lands of the divinely ordained Order of Bahá'u'lláh. This first center was rapidly reinforced by the conversion of the first English believer and of the first Frenchman to accept the Faith—the distinguished Hippolyte Dreyfus, whose "preeminent role" it was to kindle "the torch which is destined to shed eternal illumination upon his native land and its people"—and by Laura Barney, whose "imperishable service" was to transmit to posterity *Some Answered Questions*. The steadfastness and devotion of the Paris Bahá'í Community during the dark and somber days of the Second World War earned great praise from the beloved Guardian of the Faith, while the recent signs of widespread and effective teaching work throughout France lend wings to the hope that this veteran, sorely tested and steadfast community is about to gather the harvest of those potent seeds sown and nourished so lovingly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

It is highly propitious that this city, thrice blessed by the presence of the Master, should be the scene of the first International Bahá'í Conference in France and one of the eight International Conferences to be held around the world during the Five Year Plan. You are gathered in this historic spot to deliberate on the fortunes of that Plan, to derive inspiration from the deeds performed there in the Heroic Age of our Faith and from your association together, to rededicate yourselves to the service of Bahá'u'lláh and to determine, each and every one, how best you can promote the victory of the Five Year Plan. We call to your attention 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words:

The call of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá can be heard far and wide. It is my hope that this soul-stirring melody of the Abhá Kingdom may also be raised high in Paris, for Paris is tumultuous in all things. I pray the Almighty that the music and singing of the beloved of God will be so loud that the vibrations thereof may cause the limbs of Paris to quake. I await very joyful tidings from the friends in Paris.

Unquestionably the divine melody will in the future be raised in that city, but I long that this may happen in these days of the Covenant, and that you will be the enchanting songsters and the sweet-singing nightingales of that land.

Our hopes are high and we pray at the Sacred Threshold that from this Conference will surge throughout Europe a wave of such sacrificial teaching as will impel large numbers of its diverse and highly talented peoples to embrace the Faith of God and dedicate themselves to the redemption of mankind under the glorious banner of the Prince of Peace.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

26 September 1976

To the Friends gathered at the International Conference in Nairobi

Beloved Friends,

The flames of enthusiasm which ignited the hearts of the followers and lovers of the Most Great Name in Helsinki, in Anchorage and in Paris are now being kindled in a city which occupies a central and envied position at the very crossroads of the vast African mainland and are destined to illumine its horizons. This Conference marking the imminent approach of the midway point of the Five Year Plan which coincides with the anniversary of the birth of the Blessed Báb, will no doubt go down in Bahá'í history as a further landmark in the irresistible march of events which have characterized the impact of the Faith of God upon that continent.

We recall that in addition to Quddús the only other companion of the Báb on His pilgrimage to Mecca was an Ethiopian, and that he and his wife were intimately associated with Him and His household in Shiraz. During the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh a few of His stalwart disciples reached the northeastern shores of Africa, and under His direct guidance, announced the glad tidings of the New Day to the people of the Nile, thus opening to the Faith two countries of the African mainland. Soon afterwards, His blessed person approached those shores in the course of His exile to the Holy Land. Still later He voiced His significant utterance in which He compared the colored people to "the black pupil of the eye," through which "the light of the spirit shineth forth." Just over six years after His ascension, the first member of the black race to embrace His Cause in the West, who was destined to become a disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a herald of the Kingdom, and the door through which numberless members of his race were to enter that Kingdom, came on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the first group of Western friends who arrived in 'Akká to visit the Center of the Covenant. This was followed by a steady extension of the teaching work among the black people of North America, and the opening to the Faith, by the end of the Heroic Age, of two more countries in Africa, under the watchful care of the Master, Whose three visits to Egypt have blessed the soil of that Continent. Prior to the conclusion of the first Bahá'í century the number of countries opened to the Faith had been raised to seven, and the teaching work among the black race in North America had entered a new phase of development through the continuous guidance flowing from the pen of Shoghi Effendi, who himself traversed the African continent twice from south to north, and who, in the course of his ministry, elevated two members of the black race to the rank of Hand of the Cause, appointed three more believers residing in Africa to that high office, and there raised up four National Spiritual Assemblies.

At the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade the number of countries opened to the Faith had reached twenty-four, including those opened under the aegis of the Two Year African Campaign coordinated by the British National Spiritual Assembly. The Ten Year Plan opened the rest of Africa to the light of God's Faith, and

today we see with joy and pride in that vast continent and its neighboring islands the establishment of four Boards of Counselors, thirty-four National Spiritual Assemblies—firm pillars of God’s Administrative Order—and over 2800 Local Spiritual Assemblies, nuclei of a growing Bahá’í society.

Africa, a privileged continent with a past rich in cherished associations, has reached its present stage of growth through countless feats of heroism and dedication. Before us unfolds the vision of the future. “Africa,” the beloved Guardian assures us in one of the letters written on his behalf, “is truly awakening and finding herself, and she undoubtedly has a great message to give, and a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization. To the degree to which her peoples accept Bahá’u’lláh will they be blessed, strengthened and protected.”

The realization of this glorious destiny requires that the immediate tasks be worthily discharged, and the pressing challenges and urgent requirements of the Five Year Plan be wholeheartedly and effectively met and satisfied. As the forces of darkness in that part of the world wax fiercer, and the problems facing its peoples and tribes become more critical, the believers in that continent must evince greater cohesion, scale loftier heights of heroism and self-sacrifice and demonstrate higher standards of concerted effort and harmonious development.

During the brief thirty months separating us from the end of the Plan, Africa must once again distinguish itself among its sister continents through a vast increase in the number of its believers, its Local Spiritual Assemblies and its localities opened to the Faith, and by accelerating the process of entry by troops throughout its length and breadth. The deepening of the faith, of the understanding and of the spiritual life of its individual believers must gather greater momentum; the foundations of its existing Local Spiritual Assemblies must be more speedily consolidated; the number of local Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds and of local endowments called for in the Plan must be soon acquired; the Bahá’í activities of women and of youth must be systematically stimulated; the Bahá’í education of the children of the believers must continuously be encouraged; the basis of the recognition that the institutions of the Faith have succeeded in obtaining from the authorities must steadily be broadened; mass communication facilities must be used far more frequently to teach and proclaim the Faith; and the publication and dissemination of the essential literature of the Faith must be given much greater importance. Above all it is imperative that in ever greater measure each individual believer should realize the vital need to subordinate his personal advantages to the overall welfare of the Cause, to awaken and reinforce his sense of responsibility before God to promote and protect its vital interests at all costs, and to renew his total consecration and dedication to His glorious Faith, so that, himself enkindled with the flames of its holy fire, he may, in concert with his fellow-believers, ignite the light of faith and certitude in the hearts of his family, his tribe, his countrymen and all the peoples of that mighty continent, in preparation for the day when Africa’s major contribution to world civilization will become fully consummated.

We fervently pray at the Holy Shrines that these hopes and aspirations may soon come true, and that the “pure-hearted” and “spiritually receptive” people of Africa may draw ever nearer to the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh, and may become shining examples of self-abnegation, of courage and of love to the supporters of the Most Great Name in every land.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



November 1976

To the Friends assembled at the International Teaching Conference in Hong Kong

Dearly loved Friends,

With grateful and joyous hearts we extend our warmest greetings and express our highest hopes to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered, at this critical point of the Five Year Plan, in this Conference on Asia's eastern shore. This great continent has nourished mighty civilizations; above its horizons the suns of major Revelations of God have risen; on its soil many of the heroes of this New Age have shed their blood and offered their lives in token of their love for Him Who is the Beloved of the World and the Desire of the Nations.

What an imperishable glory has been bestowed upon the people of Asia, the first to be illumined by the rays of God's Faith, the first recipients of His Call and the first promoters of His Cause. Their spiritual capacity is extolled and the great role they are destined to play in the strengthening of the foundation of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh unhesitatingly affirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Tablets of the Divine Plan.

This great continent contains within its boundaries the heart of the Faith and its Cradle, the lands wherein its Founders toiled and suffered, and not only the great majority of the human race but the great majority of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. The potentiality of such a situation cannot be underestimated, nor must the great force latent within so large a proportion of the Army of Light be neglected. They must be mobilized to accelerate the expansion of the beloved Cause, to consolidate its victories, to enhance its prestige and to augment its influence. We appeal to every participant in this historic Conference to become conscious of these tremendous but hidden potentialities which, if properly tapped and directed, can hasten the process of the spiritualization of the nations of Asia, the influence of which will extend far beyond the confines of that continent—even to the entire planet.

We eagerly await news that from this Conference will surge throughout Asia a wave of vigorous activity devoted to the execution on the individual, local and national levels, of systematic plans designed to attract the great masses of that continent to the life-giving, all-embracing Message of Bahá'u'lláh. Such plans must provide opportunities for those thousands who in recent years have swelled the rank and file, as well as for those veterans who have, for so many years, striven in the path of service to the Cause. It is through active participation of more and more new believers in both teaching and administration that the consolidation of the Bahá'í community can best be achieved.

In a continent so richly endowed, so greatly blessed, new generations of Bahá'ís must continually be raised up, trained from childhood in the school of the love of God, and nurtured under the shadow of His Cause.

Bahá'ís in every country must be constantly urged and, wherever necessary, assisted to pass on to their children as their most cherished legacy, the precious Faith they themselves have embraced. Those new generations of Bahá'ís will have a vital role in consolidating the Cause of God on a firm foundation.

The establishment of Local Assemblies as the basic administrative unit of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and as rallying points for the Bahá'ís of every community should, in accordance with the objectives of the Five Year Plan, be multiplied no matter at what cost of effort and endurance. The process of invigorating the Local Assemblies requires, during the Five Year Plan, the consultation of all the institutions of the Cause.

Publication of literature in many languages as part of a determined campaign to win thousands upon thousands of diverse peoples in all spheres of life must be vigorously pursued. Participation of all believers in supporting the Bahá'í Funds, the lifeblood of the Cause, must be given adequate attention, and the blessings which reward the act of voluntary giving for the promotion of the Faith, no matter how small the amount may be, must be lovingly and wisely explained.

May this Conference become a landmark in the process of attracting vast numbers of the great Chinese race scattered throughout the world. May it be a prelude to the unprecedented expansion of the Faith in all the countries of Asia. May it become a source of strength to the supporters of the Most Great Name so that despite the rising tide of trials and upheavals afflicting the world, and whatever forces of opposition may be mounted against the Cause of God itself, the believers will not waver or become diverted from their course, but be ever more confirmed in their determination to raise the edifice of the Faith of God as the last bastion of hope to a lost and wayward humanity.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 December 1976

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 12 October 1976 proposing the establishment of an International Human Development Center has caused us concern for a number of reasons. It is true that in our letter of 23 December 1975 we stated: "We feel that it is for your Assembly to decide what methods should be employed to bring about the desired result," but your present proposals are a great enlargement and development of the concepts outlined in your letter of 5 December 1975 and involve the establishment of an institution with international ramifications requiring financial assistance from beyond the confines of your own community.

We are acutely aware of the varied problems of community and character development that the American Bahá'í community faces. They are problems that in varying ways and to different degrees face every Bahá'í community in the world. In many countries they are further complicated by grinding poverty, widespread illiteracy, religious persecution or compulsory political indoctrination.

As you quite correctly observe, Bahá'í Administration should make use of whatever expertise or appropriate instruments are available, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, for the attainment of its objectives. But this is not the same as establishing a quasi-Bahá'í institution under Bahá'í auspices based on one particular theory. It is far too early in the development of the Faith and of the social sciences for the Administrative Order thus to promote one particular system or theory of education. A similar situation exists in the field of psychology. As you are well aware, many people come into the Faith needing psychiatric treatment, and it is often very difficult for them to find a psychiatrist who will not urge them to some course of behavior which is contrary to the teachings of the Faith. There are a number of Bahá'í psychologists and psychiatrists who are endeavoring to develop their skills in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and use can certainly be made of their services where available—but it would be premature to consider establishing a Bahá'í School of Psychology....

The grave problems faced by Bahá'í parents and children, when the children must attend schools that are strongly influenced by the degradation of present-day society, are fully appreciated. However, the only ways to completely overcome these dangers would seem to be either to effect a reform of the entire non-Bahá'í educational system or to provide a worldwide network of Bahá'í schools. Both ways are very long-term projects beyond the capacity of the Bahá'í community at this time. Already, of course, Bahá'í communities are establishing primary or tutorial schools in many parts of the world, but these are small and few in number and are located where there are such conditions as general illiteracy among the believers or where

no other schools are available to them. Undoubtedly, in time, this process will gain momentum, and Bahá'í schools of ever higher quality and scope will be established in country after country, as has already occurred in India, but necessarily, this must now be a gradual process related, among other things, to the resources of the community, the number of Bahá'í children needing education, and the availability of other suitable schools. Perhaps in certain parts of the United States there are sufficiently large concentrations of Bahá'í children to make the running of a private Bahá'í school feasible—such a proposal has, indeed, been made by a number of individual believers in Alaska, principally teachers, but we stressed in that instance that, if implemented, it should be conducted as a private venture and that the people concerned should give very careful consideration to all the factors involved before initiating it; furthermore we pointed out to them their opportunities for improving the schools in which they themselves worked.

Failing a nationwide system of Bahá'í schools, the establishment of which is clearly out of the question at this stage of the growth of the Cause in the United States, Bahá'í parents will continue to be faced with the problems caused by the exposure of their children to irreligious and immoral attitudes, behavior, and even instruction, from their fellow pupils and their teachers. This is a great challenge to Bahá'í parents, to the Bahá'í children themselves, and to the Spiritual Assemblies. It was to assist in meeting such challenges that we recently issued the compilation of Bahá'í prayers for children and that on Bahá'í education. Your Assembly is correct in its view that a major effort will have to be exerted to raise the number and quality of Bahá'í children's classes, and to assist Bahá'í parents to bring up their children as firm Bahá'ís able to withstand the moral and spiritual poisons and temptations of the society around them....

In addition to the specific problems of child education, you instance the difficulties of local communities which are faced with the task of reorienting and integrating into the Cause new believers who enter with all sorts of immoral and even criminal tendencies from their former life. This is indeed difficult, but this is the very stuff of the work of the Cause. The Bahá'í Faith not only provides teachings in accordance with which the behavior of human beings can be reformed, but also makes available a spiritual power which reinforces the devoted efforts of every believer, whether veteran or neophyte. Arising to serve the Cause has, itself, a transforming effect upon believers, as the beloved Guardian wrote with respect to service upon Spiritual Assemblies: "If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we arise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power." Thus, what is most imperative for the promotion of the spiritual life of local Bahá'í communities is the stimulation of the believers to increase their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, their absolute reliance upon Him and upon His love, and their determination to apply His teachings in every aspect of their lives. This stimulation can be conveyed from heart to heart and mind to mind by devoted Bahá'ís without the need of formal training....

As we pointed out previously, you have already initiated excellent programs; we continually receive evidence of the enthusiasm with which they have been received by local communities in the United States. You should persevere with these programs, expanding and supplementing them as necessary with others

that you may judge desirable for the work of the Cause in the conditions of each of the widely diverse areas of your vast national territory. One of the most potent aids to the consolidation of local communities and Assemblies and the deepening of the faith of the believers, is the services of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants. Here is an institution of the Faith, reaching into every locality, composed of firm believers who know the area they have to serve and are familiar with its problems and potentialities—an institution expressly designed to encourage and reinforce the work of the Spiritual Assemblies, to enthuse the believers, to stimulate them to study the Teachings and apply them in their lives—a body of Bahá'ís whose efforts and services will complement and support the work being done by your committees and by the Local Assemblies themselves in every sphere of Bahá'í endeavor....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

January 1977

To the Friends assembled at the International Teaching Conference in Auckland

Dearly loved Friends,

With hearts full of love and admiration for the followers of the Most Great Name in Australasia we send our warmest greetings to all assembled in this historic gathering in the heart of the Antipodes.

How great is your place in Bahá'í history! How bright are the prospects for the future of the Cause so lovingly nurtured for more than half a century by hundreds of stalwart steadfast believers, spiritual heirs of Hyde and Clara Dunn, who in direct response to the Tablets of the Divine Plan forsook their home and went to pioneer in Australia, and whose names, Shoghi Effendi wrote, were "graven in letters of gold" upon his heart. In March 1951, when in the entire Pacific area there was but one National Spiritual Assembly, the beloved Guardian predicted that "The prizes destined for the heroic warriors, battling for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the Southern Hemisphere, and particularly Australasia, are glorious beyond compare. The assistance to be vouchsafed to them from on high in their struggle for its establishment, its recognition and triumph is ready to be poured forth in astonishing abundance."

Now, twenty-five years later, the achievements are truly astounding. Beginning with the establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand at Ridván 1957, the number of National Assemblies has increased elevenfold; the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Antipodes has been erected near Sydney; His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II of Western Samoa has become the first reigning monarch to embrace the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh; the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies now stands at over 360; and the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside in this vast oceanic area covering well-nigh one-eighth of the earth's surface is more than 1,800. These accomplishments doubtless have been a source of great joy to the immortal soul of Shoghi Effendi, whose esteem and affection for the followers of Bahá'u'lláh laboring for His Cause in the Antipodes was frequently expressed in glowing terms in his letters to the Assemblies and friends in Australasia.

Dear friends, we have now passed the midpoint of the Five Year Plan. You are met in the beautiful city of Auckland to take stock and to make plans for attaining the victories which will surely be yours.

The National Spiritual Assemblies of the New Hebrides and of the Marshall Islands are to be raised up next Ridván; plans for the soon-to-be-erected Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Samoa are in process; but although the goal of establishing Bahá'í centers totaling 2,188 is within easy reach, the Local Assembly goals assigned to each national community, totaling 613, need prompt and decisive attention. The divine assistance spoken of by the beloved Guardian in 1951 has ever been available, and is still "ready to be poured forth in astonishing

abundance.” It is within your power during the coming year to win all assigned teaching goals, leaving the final year of the Plan for consolidation and the winning of supplementary victories.

This will be achieved, not by resting on laurels, but by manifesting those qualities of faith, judgment, vision, loyalty, courage and self-sacrifice which earned the Guardian’s praise so frequently in past decades. Let the valiant Australasian Bahá’í communities vie once more with their sister communities throughout the world for the palm of victory and maintain their position in the vanguard of the Army of Light.

Pioneers, traveling teachers and a fresh outpouring of funds are essential ingredients to the onward march of the Cause throughout Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the South Pacific. Let those who can offer their valued services to the teaching work arise without delay; let those who cannot travel or pioneer deputize those who can go in their stead.

We cherish the highest hopes for the success of your endeavors and it is our constant prayer that Bahá’u’lláh will shower His richest blessings and confirmations upon you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

January 1977

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the International Teaching Conference in Bahia, Brazil

Dearly loved Friends,

With joyous hearts we hail the convocation of this first of the twin Latin American Conferences closing the series of eight International Bahá'í Conferences held during the midway period of the Five Year Plan.

The ringing call of Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book to the Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein was followed after an interval of more than four decades by the revelation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan in which the beloved Master stressed the importance of the Republics of the South American Continent.

The first believer to respond to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's divine call was that star-servant of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, valiant, indomitable Martha Root, who in 1919 visited many important cities in South America. Two years later Leonora Holsapple Armstrong, mother of the Bahá'ís of Brazil, settled in Bahia. The teaching work in the continent progressed steadily to the point where, in 1937, the beloved Guardian launched his first Seven Year Plan paving the way for the raising in subsequent Plans of the institution of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order in every one of its republics and in its islands. It was in the course of that first Seven Year Plan that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's beloved handmaid, May Maxwell, in 1940 won a martyr's crown when she laid down her life in Argentina, thereby adding further luster to the spiritual history of South America.

How truly fitting, then, that this auspicious Conference have its venue in the city of Bahia, singled out for special mention by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Tablets of the Divine Plan. And how timely it is at this crucial point in the Five Year Plan that the friends gathered in Bahia from many lands prayerfully consider, and arise to prosecute expeditiously all measures aimed at achieving glorious victory in all goals of the Plan.

Noteworthy progress has been achieved in many fields of service throughout the South American Bahá'í community, particularly in attracting to the Cause large numbers of its indigenous peoples. But myriads of pure-hearted souls have not yet heard the clarion call of Bahá'u'lláh and hungrily await the spiritual nourishment that only His followers can give them.

Steps must be taken to attract members of every stratum of society to the divine circle of the Faith through effective proclamation and teaching. Greater utilization of radio broadcasts is necessary, not only to reach all levels of society but also to deepen the believers themselves. The valuable and dynamic services of Bahá'í youth must be multiplied in the fields of pioneering and travel teaching. A far wider dissemination of



Bahá'í literature must be accompanied by a continuous program of translation of the Sacred Text into the major indigenous languages of the continent.

The continental goals for South America of 8,670 centers and 2,293 Local Spiritual Assemblies must be won, and may even be surpassed, for every country must achieve the goals assigned to it. This calls for the dedicated effort of every National Spiritual Assembly, every Local Spiritual Assembly and indeed every believer. All the divinely ordained instruments of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh must now unite in executing a symphony of victory in all the unfinished goals of the Five Year Plan, winning thereby the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty.

Beloved friends, go forward with complete assurance that a continent so rich in spiritual promise, so diverse in its peoples and races, so fertile for the planting of the seeds of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith will yield a brilliant harvest for all who labor in that Divine Vineyard.

It is our fervent loving prayer at the Sacred Threshold that Bahá'u'lláh's bountiful confirmations and richest blessings may be showered upon you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

February 1977

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the International Teaching Conference in Mérida, Mexico

Dearly loved Friends,

With joyous hearts and eager anticipation we send warmest greetings to you the participants in the last of the eight great International Teaching Conferences marking the halfway point of the Five Year Plan.

The convening of this Conference in the Republic of Mexico, in the capital city of a state that was once an important part of a great Indian empire, provides a unique opportunity to initiate what may well become the widespread reawakening of a people whose ancestors more than 1,200 years ago developed one of the most brilliant pre-Columbian civilizations known to modern man. These present-day descendants, many of whom have already embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and who consider the Yucatán Peninsula and the seacoast lowlands and rugged spine of mountains joining North and South America to be their homeland, are among the very people mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Tablets of the Divine Plan as having a great destiny once they have accepted His Father's Cause. Here, too, and throughout Middle America, are those whose forefathers came from the Iberian Peninsula, Africa, and the Far East linking the Old with the New World.

Conscious of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's impassioned plea to promulgate the oneness of mankind to a spiritually impoverished humanity, a handful of itinerant Bahá'í teachers set forth four decades ago, traversed the land bridge connecting the two continents of the Western Hemisphere and carried the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the Spanish-American Republics. Their dedicated efforts were rewarded when, in 1938, the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Latin America was formed in Mexico City. This initial triumph at the inception of the first of the teaching plans formulated by Shoghi Effendi spearheaded other victories leading to the formation of two, then of four Regional Spiritual Assemblies and ultimately to the establishment of National Spiritual Assemblies in each of the republics of Latin America and in the islands of the Caribbean.

Praiseworthy indeed were these achievements but the Bahá'í communities of Central America and the West Indies must not be content to rest on these laurels. The beloved Guardian during the last months of his precious life continually urged the friends of Latin America to pursue what he described as "the paramount task," the teaching work. How much more does that injunction apply today! In less than thirty months, approximately 900 groups and isolated centers and over 400 Local Spiritual Assemblies must be added to those already existing in the mainland and island nations of Middle America!

To accomplish this challenging task, intensive effort to attract new believers, be they black, brown, red or white, from all strata of society, must be exerted. Hand in hand with this endeavor, particularly in local communities, goes the development of the distinctive character of Bahá'í life. Prompt attention must also be given to the acquisition of local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and endowments; and the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature, especially in indigenous languages, must be accelerated.

Dear friends, if at the close of the Five Year Plan we are to witness the ensigns of victory lifted high, the wholehearted support of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh must be enlisted now and their energies systematically channeled into areas most in need. We cherish the hope that at this final Conference the friends will arise with enthusiasm and determination not only to win the remaining goals of the Plan but to carry out Shoghi Effendi's injunction to win the allegiance of members of the various tribes of American Indians to the Cause, thereby hastening the period prophesied by the Master when the Indian peoples of America would become a source of spiritual illumination to the world.

Our hearts, our hopes and our prayers will be with you during all the days of your deliberations. May Bahá'u'lláh inspire each and every one of you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

6 March 1977

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The establishment and strong growth of Local Spiritual Assemblies is one of the most fundamental requirements for the spread of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, the development of Bahá'í community life and the emergence of a transformed society. This theme has been made one of the central goals of the Five Year Plan, and National Spiritual Assemblies, aided by their committees, have been making strenuous efforts to establish new Local Spiritual Assemblies and to consolidate those which have lapsed or are in need of strengthening.

Already a number of specific steps have been taken by The Universal House of Justice to assist National Spiritual Assemblies towards the attainment of these objectives. The most far-reaching of these steps is the authority given to members of the Auxiliary Boards to appoint assistants whose primary aim is to stimulate and assist the believers to bring into being and to consolidate Local Spiritual Assemblies in all localities where nine or more Bahá'ís reside, and to advise and assist these Assemblies in the performance of their God-given duties. The effects of the appointment of assistants by Auxiliary Board members are beginning to appear and will undoubtedly bear more and more fruit as the months pass.

Nevertheless, it is of concern to The Universal House of Justice that, in spite of the efforts of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the Auxiliary Boards and of all the believers who are laboring in the field, there are many areas in which there are communities of nine or more believers who are left, for year after year, without the blessing of the divine institution of a Local Spiritual Assembly. This is a phenomenon of the present stage of the spread of the Faith where there has been a rapid acceptance of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh by people who, because of factors such as illiteracy, unfamiliarity with the concepts of Bahá'í administration, or an attitude to the calendar and the passage of time that is different from that of city-dwellers, fail to reelect their Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Riḍván. National Assemblies are striving to send pioneers and traveling teachers to deepen such believers in their understanding of the teachings and administrative principles of the Faith, but often the localities in which they dwell are remote from the other friends or difficult to reach, and there are, in any case, too few well-grounded believers who can be sent on such projects.

Not wishing such communities to be deprived of the bounty and experience of having Local Spiritual Assemblies, we have decided that, in such cases, when the local friends fail to elect their Spiritual Assembly on the First Day of Riḍván, they should do so on any subsequent day of the Riḍván Festival. This is not a general permission to all Local Spiritual Assemblies; it is intended only for those which are affected by

factors such as those mentioned above, and it is for your Assembly to decide the areas or Assemblies in your country to which it will apply. The aim is still to so consolidate all communities that they will elect their Assemblies regularly on the First Day of Riḍván.

It is hoped that this decision will do much to help you consolidate the communities throughout your area of jurisdiction. It does not change the permission given at the beginning of the Five Year Plan for new Assemblies, being formed for the first time, to be formed at any time during the year.

We shall supplicate the Blessed Perfection to reinforce with the Hosts of Heaven every effort you make towards this vital objective.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

24 March 1977

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

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'LLÁH 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 COUNSELORS NORTH CENTRAL AMERICA AUSTRALASIA; ATTAINMENT GOAL SETTLEMENT MIDWAY POINT PLAN MAJORITY PIONEERS CALLED FOR DURING FIRST PHASE ACCOMPANIED GREAT OUTFLOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVELING 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 NÚR 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 FELLOWMEN.

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 TRAVELING. 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

#### **AUXILIARY BOARDS—RIDVÁN 1977**

| <b>Former</b> | <b>Present</b>  | <b>New</b>   |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>Number</b> | <b>Increase</b> | <b>Total</b> |

**Africa**

Protection:

|                  |    |    |    |
|------------------|----|----|----|
| Northern         | 5  | -  | 5  |
| Western          | 11 | 13 | 24 |
| Central and East | 13 | 23 | 36 |
| Southern         | 7  | 9  | 16 |
|                  | 36 |    | 81 |

Propagation:

|                  |    |    |    |
|------------------|----|----|----|
| Northern         | 5  | -  | 5  |
| Western          | 14 | 19 | 33 |
| Central and East | 19 | 17 | 36 |
| Southern         | 16 | 9  | 25 |
|                  | 54 |    | 99 |

**Western Hemisphere**

Protection:

|                 |    |   |    |
|-----------------|----|---|----|
| North America   | 9  | 9 | 18 |
| Central America | 11 | 7 | 18 |
| South America   | 16 | 2 | 18 |
|                 | 36 |   | 54 |

Propagation:

|               |    |   |    |
|---------------|----|---|----|
| North America | 18 | 9 | 27 |
|---------------|----|---|----|



|                 |    |    |     |
|-----------------|----|----|-----|
| Central America | 16 | 11 | 27  |
| South America   | 38 | 25 | 63  |
|                 | 72 |    | 117 |

### Asia

#### Protection:

|               |    |    |    |
|---------------|----|----|----|
| Western       | 9  | 9  | 18 |
| South Central | 6  | 30 | 36 |
| Northeastern  | 3  | 15 | 18 |
| Southeastern  | 9  | 18 | 27 |
|               | 27 |    | 99 |

#### Propagation:

|               |    |    |     |
|---------------|----|----|-----|
| Western       | 18 | 18 | 36  |
| South Central | 30 | 6  | 36  |
| Northeastern  | 15 | 3  | 18  |
| Southeastern  | 27 | -  | 27  |
|               | 90 |    | 117 |

### Australasia

|              |    |   |    |
|--------------|----|---|----|
| Protection:  | 9  | 9 | 18 |
| Propagation: | 18 | 9 | 27 |

### Europe

|                          |            |            |            |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Protection:              | 9          | 18         | 27         |
| Propagation:             | 27         | 9          | 36         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>378</b> | <b>297</b> | <b>675</b> |
| <b>Total Protection</b>  | <b>117</b> | <b>162</b> | <b>279</b> |
| <b>Total Propagation</b> | <b>261</b> | <b>135</b> | <b>396</b> |

## The Universal House of Justice

### Department of the Secretariat

21 August 1977

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has studied your long letter of 19 May 1977. With many of your observations it thoroughly agrees; others, it believes are founded on erroneous information, on an inaccurate assessment of the current status of the Bahá'í community, or on misconceptions about the objectives towards which it is working. The House of Justice does not have the time which would be required to formulate a detailed reply to all the various points in your letter. It reaffirms, however, the decisions conveyed to your National Spiritual Assembly in its letter of 2 December 1976, and has instructed us to add the following comments.

Mankind's response to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh has been dangerously, one might say disastrously, slow. From the earliest days it has been brought to the notice of leaders and scholars, but few of these, very few, have rallied to its support. The most profound and most widespread response has been from the middle classes and indeed from the poor, the unlettered, the deprived and the suffering. But, as the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf on 20 June 1942,

That is perhaps what is most glorious about our present activities all over the world, that we, a band not large in numbers, not possessing financial backing or the prestige of great names, should, in the name of our beloved Faith, be forging ahead at such a pace, and demonstrating to future and present generations that it is the God-given qualities of our religion that are raising it up and not the transient support of worldly fame and power. All that will come later, when it has been made clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that what raised aloft the banner of Bahá'u'lláh was the love, sacrifice, and devotion of His humble followers and the change that His teachings wrought in their hearts and lives.

Already the situation is changing, and larger numbers of believers are occupying positions of eminence and distinction in the world, but, in comparison with the overwhelming majority of the Bahá'ís, they are still a small handful. The process of changing the hearts and lives is also a gradual one, but while we should strive to hasten it, we should not let the problems dismay us. On 5 July 1947 the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer:

The primary reason for anyone becoming a Bahá'í must of course be because he has come to believe the doctrines, the teachings and the Order of Bahá'u'lláh are the correct thing for this stage in the world's evolution. The Bahá'ís themselves as a body have one great advantage: they are sincerely convinced Bahá'u'lláh is right; they have a plan, and they are trying to follow it. But to pretend they are perfect, that the Bahá'ís of the future will not be a hundred times more mature, better balanced, more exemplary in their conduct, would be foolish.

The Universal House of Justice is aware of the magnitude of the problems that the Bahá'í communities face, but as the response to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh increases and as the Bahá'í community throughout the world shows its ability to overcome these problems, the attention of men and women of every stratum of society will increasingly be drawn to the Faith. The most urgent need now—so late is the hour—is for the Bahá'ís to spread the Message, while they are still able to do so, to the largest possible number of their fellow human beings, simultaneously expanding and consolidating the Bahá'í community as quickly as they can with the resources at their disposal. As mankind passes through the darkest phase of its history, the Bahá'í community will have to face not only entry by troops, which it is now experiencing, but, before too long, mass conversion.

The first step in the reconstruction of human society is for individuals to accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and to begin to strive, as well as they can, to follow His Teachings in their individual and in their communal lives. Conversion is but the first step, yet it is the essential one. Without it no amount of expertise or scientifically based knowledge will have a lasting effect, because the fundamental motivating and sustaining power will be lacking.

As the Bahá'í community grows it will acquire experts in numerous fields—both by Bahá'ís becoming experts and by experts becoming Bahá'ís. As these experts bring their knowledge and skill to the service of the community and, even more, as they transform their various disciplines by bringing to bear upon them the light of the Divine Teachings, problem after problem now disrupting society will be answered. In such developments they should strive to make the utmost use of non-Bahá'í resources and should collaborate fully with non-Bahá'ís who are working in the same fields. Such collaboration will, in the long run, be of far more benefit than any attempt now to treat such scientific endeavors as specifically Bahá'í projects operating under Bahá'í institutions and financed by investment of Bahá'í funds.

Paralleling this process, Bahá'í institutional life will also be developing, and as it does so the Assemblies will draw increasingly upon scientific and expert knowledge—whether of Bahá'ís or of non-Bahá'ís—to assist in solving the problems of their communities.

In time great Bahá'í institutions of learning, great international and national projects for the betterment of human life will be inaugurated and flourish.

The Bahá'í work for the reconstruction of human society can thus be seen to comprise three streams: the most fundamental is the spreading of the Word of God, the winning of the allegiance of ever-greater numbers of men and women to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative

Order; concurrent with this is the contribution to human advancement and to the progress of the Bahá'í community made by individual Bahá'ís in the pursuit of their daily work; and then there are the projects and institutions for human advancement launched and operated by Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies as their resources grow and the range of their activities expands. It is for The Universal House of Justice to direct the energies of the believers in these various channels and to make known what activities are timely and have priority. It considers that the establishment of an International Human Development Center now as a Bahá'í-affiliated institution would be untimely and ill-advised.

The House of Justice assures you of its prayers for the confirmation of your endeavors on behalf of the Faith and in your professional work.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

27 March 1978

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the believers wrote recently to The Universal House of Justice requesting an elucidation of a statement made by it in one of its letters about the relationship between the Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. The House of Justice instructed us to send the following reply, which is now being shared with all National Assemblies as it will undoubtedly be of interest to the believers in general.

The statement that the Boards of Counselors outrank the National Institutions of the Faith has a number of implications. A Board of Counsellors has the particular responsibility of caring for the protection and propagation of the Faith throughout a continental zone which contains a number of national Bahá'í communities. In performing these tasks it neither directs nor instructs the Spiritual Assemblies or individual believers, but it has the necessary rank to enable it to ensure that it is kept properly informed and that the Spiritual Assemblies give due consideration to its advice and recommendations. However, the essence of the relationships between Bahá'í institutions is loving consultation and a common desire to serve the Cause of God rather than a matter of rank or station.

It is clear from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as from those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the interpretations of the Guardian, that the proper functioning of human society requires the preservation of ranks and classes within its membership. The friends should recognize this without envy or jealousy, and those who occupy ranks should never exploit their position or regard themselves as being superior to others. About this Bahá'u'lláh has written:

And amongst the realms of unity is the unity of rank and station. It redoundeth to the exaltation of the Cause, glorifying it among all peoples. Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world hath been laid waste. It hath become desolate. Those who have quaffed from the ocean of divine utterance and fixed their gaze upon the Realm of Glory should regard themselves as being on the same level as the others and in the same station. Were this matter to be definitely established and

conclusively demonstrated through the power and might of God, the world would become as the Abhá Paradise.

Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression. Great is the blessedness of those who are adorned with the ornament of this unity and have been graciously confirmed by God.

In similar vein, Shoghi Effendi gave this warning to those who are elected to serve on National Spiritual Assemblies:

They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection....

Courtesy, reverence, dignity, respect for the rank and achievements of others are virtues which contribute to the harmony and well-being of every community, but pride and self-aggrandizement are among the most deadly of sins.

The House of Justice hopes that all the friends will remember that the ultimate aim in life of every soul should be to attain spiritual excellence—to win the good pleasure of God. The true spiritual station of any soul is known only to God. It is quite a different thing from the ranks and stations that men and women occupy in the various sectors of society. Whoever has his eyes fixed on the goal of attaining the good pleasure of God will accept with joy and radiant acquiescence whatever work or station is assigned to him in the Cause of God, and will rejoice to serve Him under all conditions.

There are many passages on this theme in the Holy Writings, and The Universal House of Justice hopes that these remarks will help the friends to turn to them and understand their purport.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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 Counselors 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 fulfill 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 fellowmen.

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 fulfillment 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 centers 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 overall 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 Counselors 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 Counselors 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 endeavors 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

11 October 1978

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your moving appeal for guidance in your letter of 5 September 1978, and has instructed us to convey to you the following advice.

Each individual is unique and has a unique path to tread in his lifetime. In espousing the Bahá'í Faith you have defined the direction of that path, for your recognition of God's Manifestation for this Day and your devotion to His Message provide the spiritual and ethical basis for all aspects of your life of service to mankind, while the continuing guidance that He has provided for the community of His followers enables you to know the directions in which the most effort is required at the present time.

While, during the early years of the development of the Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi sometimes gave specific instructions to individual believers on how they should serve the Cause, The Universal House of Justice seldom does this. It is, indeed, the precious privilege of the individual human being to direct the course of his own life. Through exercising this privilege while striving always to conform his conduct to the divine Teachings and devote his talents in the best possible way to the service of the Cause and mankind, a soul deepens his understanding of God and His will.

This does not mean that you are left to make your decisions without guidance. This you will find from several sources. Firstly, in general, you will find it in the Writings. Secondly, and more specifically, in the teaching plans issued by The Universal House of Justice. Thirdly, in the plans and projects of your own National Spiritual Assembly. All these, it would seem from your letter, you have been striving to follow. Fourthly, with regard to your own personal goals and actions, is the guidance you can receive through consultation—with your wife, with friends of your choice whose opinions you value, with your Local Spiritual Assembly, with such committees of your National Assembly as are concerned with the fields of activity towards which your inclinations lie. Fifthly, there is prayer and meditation.

You mention that the answers to your prayers never seem to have come through clearly. Mrs. Ruth Moffett has published her recollection of five steps of prayer for guidance that she was told by the beloved Guardian. When asked about these notes, Shoghi Effendi replied, in letters written by his secretary on his behalf, that the notes should be regarded as "personal suggestions," that he considered them to be "quite

sound,” but that the friends need not adopt them “strictly and universally.” The House of Justice feels that they may be helpful to you and, indeed, you may already be familiar with them. They are as follows:

... use these five steps if we have a problem of any kind for which we desire a solution, or wish help.

Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations, as they have the greatest power. Learn to remain in the silence of contemplation for a few moments. During this deepest communion take the next step.

Arrive at a decision and hold to this. This decision is usually born in a flash at the close or during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment, but if it seems to be an answer to prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.

Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.

Have faith and confidence, that the Power of the Holy Spirit will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right message, the right principle or the right book will be given to you. Have confidence, and the right thing will come to meet your need. Then as you rise from prayer take immediately the fifth step.

Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And, as you act, you yourself will become a magnet which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine Power to flow through you.

Also the Guardian’s secretary wrote to an individual believer on his behalf: “The Master said guidance was when the doors opened after we tried. We can pray, ask to do God’s will only, try hard, and then if we find our plan is not working out, assume it is not the right one, at least for the moment.”

The Universal House of Justice deeply appreciates your candor and spirit of devotion, and assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

15 December 1978

To National Spiritual Assemblies

FRIENDS IRAN AND MOST HOLY PLACES IN SHIRAZ AND TEHRAN IN GRAVE PERIL. BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE BEEN THREATENED OVER SEVERAL WEEKS MOST PARTS IRAN WITH IMMINENT DANGERS. THIS THREAT IS NOW MATERIALIZING IN FORMS OF LOOTING, BURNING BAHÁ'Í HOUSES AND FURTHER THREATS OF ASSASSINATION. IN NAYRÍZ 25 BAHÁ'Í HOMES BURNED, IN SHIRAZ 60 HOMES LOOTED. SIMILAR ATTACKS REPORTED IN OTHER PROVINCES. IN SARVISTÁN BAHÁ'ÍS TAKEN TO MOSQUES AND FORCIBLY REQUIRED TO RECANT THEIR FAITH.... URGE FRIENDS JOIN US PRAYERS PROTECTION FRIENDS HOLY PLACES CRADLE FAITH.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

3 January 1979

To the Participants in the Bahá'í Studies Seminar held in Cambridge on 30 September and 1 October 1978

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has read with great interest the report of your seminar. It regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity. It noted that there are a number of problems with which you have been grappling, and while it feels that it should, in general, leave the working out of solutions to Bahá'í scholars themselves, the House of Justice has the impression that it would be helpful to provide you, at this relatively early stage of the development of Bahá'í scholarship, with a few thoughts on matters raised during your seminar. Reports of your seminar were therefore referred to the Research Department, and The Universal House of Justice commends to your study the enclosed memorandum which that Department has prepared.

The House of Justice also urges you not to feel constrained in any way in consulting it about problems, whether theoretical or practical, that you meet in your work. It has noted, for example, the difficulties presented by the current temporary requirement for the review of publications, and in this connection it asks us to inform you that it has already established the policy that doctoral theses do not have to be reviewed unless there is a proposal to publish them in larger quantities than is required by the examining body.

You are still in the early stages of a very challenging and promising development in the life of the Bahá'í community, and The Universal House of Justice is eager to foster and assist your work in whatever ways it can. We are to assure you of its prayers in the Sacred Shrines on behalf of you all and of the progress of Bahá'í scholarship.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

This seminar seems to have provided a very valuable forum for the discussion of a number of aspects of Bahá'í scholarship, and the airing of certain problems which have been worrying some of the friends in relationship to their work and to their fellow believers. We believe that many of the problems arise from an attempt by some Bahá'í scholars to make use of methodologies devised by non-Bahá'ís without thinking through the implications of such a course and without working out a methodology which would be in consonance with the spirit of the Faith. The seminar itself may well prove to be an initial step in such a working out. The following remarks are intended merely to draw attention to certain aspects which we believe can help to advance this process.

It has become customary in the West to think of science and religion as occupying two distinct—and even opposed—areas of human thought and activity. This dichotomy can be characterized in the pairs of antitheses: faith and reason; value and fact. It is a dichotomy which is foreign to Bahá'í thought and should, we feel, be regarded with suspicion by Bahá'í scholars in every field. The principle of the harmony of science and religion means not only that religious teachings should be studied with the light of reason and evidence as well as of faith and inspiration, but also that everything in this creation, all aspects of human life and knowledge, should be studied in the light of revelation as well as in that of purely rational investigation. In other words, a Bahá'í scholar, when studying a subject, should not lock out of his mind any aspect of truth that is known to him.

It has, for example, become commonplace to regard religion as the product of human striving after truth, as the outcome of certain climates of thought and conditions of society. This has been taken, by many non-Bahá'í thinkers, to the extreme of denying altogether the reality or even the possibility of a specific revelation of the Will of God to mankind through a human Mouthpiece. A Bahá'í who has studied the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, who has accepted His claim to be the Manifestation of God for this Age, and who has seen His Teachings at work in his daily life, knows as the result of rational investigation, confirmed by actual experience, that true religion, far from being the product solely of human striving after truth, is the fruit of the creative Word of God which, with divine power, transforms human thought and action.

A Bahá'í, through this faith in, this “conscious knowledge” of, the reality of divine Revelation, can distinguish, for instance, between Christianity, which is the divine message given by Jesus of Nazareth, and the development of Christendom, which is the history of what men did with that message in subsequent centuries, a distinction which has become blurred if not entirely obscured in current Christian theology. A Bahá'í scholar conscious of this distinction will not make the mistake of regarding the sayings and beliefs of certain Bahá'ís at any one time as being the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Faith is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: His Own Words as interpreted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. It is a revelation of such staggering magnitude that no Bahá'í at this early stage in Bahá'í history can rightly claim to have more than a partial and imperfect understanding of it. Thus, Bahá'í historians would see the overcoming of early misconceptions held by the Bahá'í community, or by parts of the Bahá'í community, not as “developments of the Bahá'í Faith”—as a non-Bahá'í historian might well regard them—but as growth of that community's understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation.

It has been suggested that the words of Bahá'u'lláh that a true seeker should “so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error; or that hate repel him away from the truth,” support the viewpoint of methodological agnosticism. But we believe that on deeper reflection it will be recognized that love and hate are emotional attachments or repulsions that can irrationally influence the seeker; they are not aspects of the truth itself. Moreover, the whole passage concerns taking “the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days” and is summarized by Bahá'u'lláh in the words: “Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.” It is in this context that He says, near the beginning of the passage, that the seeker must, “before all else, cleanse and purify his heart ... from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy.” It is similar, we think, to Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to look upon the Manifestation with His Own eyes. In scientific investigation when searching after the facts of any matter a Bahá'í must, of course, be entirely open-minded, but in his interpretation of the facts and his evaluation of evidence we do not see by what logic he can ignore the truth of the Bahá'í Revelation which he has already accepted; to do so would, we feel, be both hypocritical and unscholarly.

Undoubtedly the fact that Bahá'í scholars of the history and teachings of the Faith believe in the Faith that they are studying will be a grave flaw in the eyes of many non-Bahá'í academics, whose own dogmatic materialism passes without comment because it is fashionable; but this difficulty is one that Bahá'í scholars share with their fellow believers in many fields of human endeavor.

If Bahá'í scholars will try to avoid this snare of allowing a divorce between their faith and their reason, we are sure that they will also avoid many of the occasions for tension arising between themselves and their fellow believers.

The sundering of science and religion is but one example of the tendency of the human mind (which is necessarily limited in its capacity) to concentrate on one virtue, one aspect of truth, one goal, to the exclusion of others. This leads, in extreme cases, to fanaticism and the utter distortion of truth, and in all cases to some degree of imbalance and inaccuracy. A scholar who is imbued with an understanding of the broad teachings of the Faith will always remember that being a scholar does not exempt him from the primal duties and purposes for which all human beings are created. All men, not scholars alone, are exhorted to seek out and uphold the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. But they are also exhorted to be wise in their utterance, to be tolerant of the views of others, to be courteous in their behavior and speech, not to sow the seeds of doubt in faithful hearts, to look at the good rather than at the bad, to avoid conflict and contention, to be reverent, to be faithful to the Covenant of God, to promote His Faith and safeguard its honor, and to educate their fellowmen, giving milk to babes and meat to those who are stronger.

Scholarship has a high station in the Bahá'í teachings, and Bahá'í scholars have a great responsibility. We believe that they would do well to concentrate upon the ascertainment of truth—of a fuller understanding of the subject of their scholarship, whatever its field—not upon exposing and attacking the errors of others,



whether they be of non-Bahá'í or of their fellow believers. Inevitably the demonstration of truth exposes the falsity of error, but the emphasis and motive are important. We refer to these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and goodwill. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If any one should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding...

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXXII)*

and again:

Should any one among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindness and goodwill. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh V)*

In our view there are two particular dangers to which Bahá'í scholars are exposed, and which they share with those believers who rise to eminent positions in the administration of the Cause. One danger is faced by only a few: those whose work requires them to read the writings of Covenant-breakers. They have to remember that they are by no means immune to the spiritual poison that such works distill, and that they must approach this aspect of their work with great caution, alert to the danger that it presents. The second danger, which may well be as insidious, is that of spiritual pride and arrogance. Bahá'í scholars, especially those who are scholars in the teachings and history of the Faith itself, would be well advised to remember that scholars have often been most wrong when they have been most certain that they were right. The virtues of moderation, humility and humor in regard to one's own work and ideas are a potent protection against this danger.

We feel that by following such avenues of approach as those described in this memorandum Bahá'í scholars will find that many of the "fears, doubts and anxieties" which were aired at the seminar will be dispelled.

## The Universal House of Justice

12 January 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

From reports in the news media you have no doubt learned of the disturbances in Iran. The followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have in the land of its birth once again been subjected to severe persecution and active repression.

The National Spiritual Assembly compiled during the month of October 1978 a list of 93 cases dealing with personal injuries inflicted upon individual believers and of damages to houses, shops, crops and livestock, as well as to local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds. During the month of December organized mobs attacked Bahá'ís and their properties in Shiraz and its environs. As a result of these attacks over 300 homes were either burned or destroyed, and some 200 looted. In these events 15 believers were beaten or wounded, and two were killed. Fortunately the intention of the attackers to destroy the Holy House of the Báb was not carried out, but the spirit of aggressive animosity towards the Bahá'ís spread to several centers throughout the province of Fárs, including the town of Marvdasht, where 31 Bahá'í homes were looted and the imposing structure of the local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds reared by that community was razed to the ground.

Following these events, the wave of persecution spread to the north of the country. In several towns and villages of Adhirbáyján, and particularly in Míyán-Duáb, the onslaught was severe. In the latter town the first target was the local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, which was totally destroyed, and this was followed by the burning or looting of 80 homes and the brutal murder of two believers, a father and his son, whose bodies were then dragged through the streets, cut in pieces, and consigned to the flames.

The organized and violent assaults on Bahá'í lives and properties have emboldened and incited hooligans all over the country, and the oppressed Bahá'ís are constantly under threat of mass aggression and assault.

These acts of hostility against the Bahá'ís have so far cost four lives, millions of dollars in loss of property, and the displacement of some 700 individuals who have become homeless. The spirit of the Bahá'ís, however, is very high, and acts of heroism and magnanimity have been reported, which historians will record for posterity.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Iran has instituted a special fund for the relief of the needy and suffering from among the believers in that country. The House of Justice has already contributed a sum of \$135,000.00 to this fund, and it calls upon all friends in every land to offer of their substance, at this hour of need, to help their tormented brethren in the Cradle of the Faith. All contributions should preferably be

sent to The Universal House of Justice, which will ensure that the contributions are transmitted safely to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran.

The House of Justice further calls on the friends the world over to join it in fervent prayers for the protection of the Faith and the Holy Places and for the relief and deliverance of the beloved and steadfast friends in Iran. It particularly invites the friends to pray daily during the period of the Fast, supplicating Bahá'u'lláh that the distressing plight of the Persian Community may be mitigated and that their sorrows and deprivations may be transmuted into comfort and joy through His grace and bounty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

26 February 1979

26 February 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Recent events in Iran have focused the attention of the world's news media on that country, and the Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í Faith have been mentioned frequently. Our enemies have spread many misleading statements and calumnies through the media.

Already in the United States the prompt reaction of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly to an attack on the Faith made during a national television program has resulted in the greatest publicity for the Cause for many years.

The friends are urged through their National and Local Assemblies, and individually, and without in any way criticizing or confronting editors and program directors, to offer articles, letters to editors, statements to radio and television producers and to take occasional advertisements. All these should be linked to any mention of the Faith, particularly though not necessarily a misleading one, and should be solely concerned with repudiating falsehoods and giving the truth about the Faith, not indulging in argument or complaint.

The Universal House of Justice is aware of a pattern in the false statements being circulated about the Faith and sends the following information to enable the friends everywhere to take action whenever the opportunity arises.

The allegations against us are mainly that in Iran the Bahá'ís have been political supporters of the previous regime, that one of the Prime Ministers and some Ministers have been Bahá'ís, and that even the head of SAVAK (the Iranian Secret Police) and other of its high-ranking officers have been members of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'ís are also accused of being against Islam and of supporting causes which are hostile to Muslim nations.

It is obvious that these allegations are entirely unfounded. The established nonpolitical nature of the Faith, as well as the principle that whoever among the friends participates in partisan politics or becomes a member of a political party is expelled from the Bahá'í community, support this. These false accusations by the enemies of the Cause are being deliberately spread for two main reasons: one, to discredit their political opponents who have been or are in power by associating them with the Faith; and two, to incite further hatred of the fanatical sections of the population against the Bahá'ís.

During the previous regime, when a one-party system, Rastakhiz, was in force in Iran and the people were induced and often compelled to become members of it, the Bahá'ís of Iran were perhaps the only community who, on the grounds of their religious beliefs, firmly refused to join this party. They declared that although, as an act of faith, they are loyal to the government of the country in which they reside, they cannot accept membership in any political party. Threats of the consequences of such refusal did not deter the Bahá'ís from standing firm in their conviction.

Regarding the false allegation that Mr. Abbas Hoveida, the ex-Prime Minister of Iran, was a Bahá'í, the facts are that his grandfather was a Bahá'í at the time of Bahá'u'lláh and his father was also a member of the Faith for some time. However, because the latter accepted a political assignment in the foreign ministry of Iran, he was expelled from the Bahá'í community. Mr. Hoveida himself never became a Bahá'í, and asserted that he was a Muslim. In fact, during his term of office, he created many difficulties for the Bahá'í community in order to counter the accusations of his alleged affiliation with the Faith. It was during his regime that many Bahá'ís were dismissed from their administrative posts in the government because of their Faith, and an anti-Bahá'í bias was fostered in respect of employment.

There was another Minister, Mansour Rouhani, whose father was a Bahá'í and mother a Muslim, but he was not, nor had ever been a Bahá'í. Further, some years ago, a Bahá'í accepted a cabinet post just for a brief time, and he was promptly expelled from the Bahá'í community.

It should be categorically denied and refuted that General Nasiri, the late head of SAVAK, as well as his assistants, were ever Bahá'ís, and it can be stated that their organization was responsible for the dismissal of many of the friends from government offices in Iran.

It is true that Bahá'ís must show loyalty to their respective governments, and it is also true that a number of the friends in Iran, while demonstrating this principle, as well as rectitude of conduct and trustworthiness, became known for these qualities and obtained high-ranking, nonpolitical, financial, and administrative positions in the government. However, loyalty and obedience to the government has never meant that the Bahá'ís agreed with or promoted political principles and policies.

Another principle of the Faith may be cited, namely, that Bahá'ís are forbidden to deny their Faith, even if their very lives are at stake. It is an historical fact that thousands of martyrs, given the choice to deny their faith so that their lives would be spared, refused to do so and proclaimed their faith openly, suffering the consequences. Therefore the public should know that whoever denies that he is a Bahá'í cannot be a member of the Bahá'í community.

In Iran the officially recognized religious minorities are the adherents of the Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian Faiths, although the Bahá'ís outnumber them all. The enemies of the Cause in Iran consider the Bahá'ís as heretical, a "sect," "cult," or similar group. This is because the Muslims, unlike Bahá'ís who believe in progressive and continuous divine revelation, believe that no prophet will appear after Muḥammad. Therefore, whenever Bahá'ís are referred to as a sect or group, the friends should try to remove this misunderstanding and proclaim the independent nature of the Faith to the non-Bahá'í public.

The Bahá'ís are also accused of being against Islam, whereas it is easy to explain to the public that we believe that all religions of the past, including Islam, are divine in origin and are revered and respected by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, the Author of this Revelation Himself states this fact time and time again in His Writings.

One of the excuses given by Muslims for hostility to the Faith is the location of our world administrative center in Israel; in the conflict between some Islamic nations and Israel, the Bahá'ís have been accused of being Zionists. It should be made clear that Bahá'ís, who believe in the oneness of humanity and who do not show enmity to any nation, people or creed, cannot take sides in any political controversy. As promoters of genuine love and proclaimers of the unity of mankind, taking sides in such disputes would be diametrically opposed to their religious beliefs. It can be explained, whenever necessary, that Bahá'u'lláh was sent, in 1868, as a Prisoner to the Holy Land by the Ottoman Emperor. For the remainder of His life He was a Prisoner and Exile, and He subsequently passed away near 'Akká in 1892. The holiest Shrines of the Bahá'í Faith, around which its world administrative center has been established, are situated in the Holy Land because of events which occurred more than half a century before the establishment of Israel and other countries in this part of the world as independent nations. Holy Shrines of the Muslims, Christians and Jews are also located in the Holy Land. Therefore, it is simple enmity to attack the Bahá'í Faith on the basis of the geographical location of its World Center.

The Universal House of Justice has requested us to bring these facts to your attention so that you may use them whenever necessary in refuting falsehoods and in answering questions and writing articles and letters to the press.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

8 May 1979

To The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

IN THE WAKE OF JOYOUS WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS VICTORIES FIVE YEAR PLAN OUR HEARTS TURN TO OUR BELEAGUERED BRETHREN CRADLE FAITH, TO DEEPENING CRISIS INTERNATIONAL FUND AND ITS SPECIAL IMPACT ON CHALLENGES FACING BAHÁ'Í WORLD IN OPENING TWO-YEAR PHASE SEVEN YEAR PLAN. OUR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION MEASURES DESIGNED MITIGATE GRAVE PROBLEM RESULTED IN DECISION ARRANGE A SERIES OF SIGNIFICANT WELL ATTENDED MEETINGS WITH FRIENDS IN SEVERAL KEY CITIES NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE TO BE PLANNED BY RESPECTIVE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES AND ADDRESSED BY MEMBER UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE. THIS MISSION ASSIGNED TO MR. BORRAH KAVELIN. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE AND WE DEEM MONTHS OF JULY AND AUGUST MOST AUSPICIOUS CARRY OUT PROGRAM, PREFERABLY COVERING UNITED STATES AND CANADA IN JULY AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN AUGUST. AMONG CITIES IN UNITED STATES, WE SUGGEST NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA, HOUSTON, WILMETTE, SAN DIEGO, LOS ANGELES, SAN FRANCISCO. WE WOULD LEAVE TO YOUR CONVENIENCE THE TIME AND LOCATION OF MEETINGS. YOU MAY ALSO CONSIDER HAVING OUR REPRESENTATIVE JOIN YOUR JUNE MEETING FOR CONSULTATION AND PROCEED FROM THERE TO INITIATE PROGRAM IN STAGES, THENCE TO CANADA. THERE IS FLEXIBILITY IN ARRANGEMENTS TO MEET CONDITIONS IN BOTH COUNTRIES. WE DEEM IT HIGHLY FITTING AND WORTHY THAT THIS PROGRAM BE LAUNCHED IN THE MUCH-LOVED COMMUNITY CALLED BY THE BELOVED MASTER APOSTLES OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND NAMED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI PRINCIPAL BUILDERS AND DEFENDERS OF A MIGHTY ORDER. IN VIEW OF THE URGENCY IN MAKING APPROPRIATE ARRANGEMENTS ON BOTH CONTINENTS, WE WOULD APPRECIATE AN EARLY RESPONSE FROM YOU.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice

10 May 1979

To National Spiritual Assemblies

NEWS JUST RECEIVED BLESSED HOUSE SHIRAZ AND FOUR ADJACENT HOUSES SEIZED BY ARMED MEN LAST WEEK OCCUPIED BY THEM FEW DAYS, BAHÁ'Í CUSTODIANS THEN SENT AWAY AND DOORS LOCKED AND SEALED....

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 fellowmen 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 Center 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 Counselors, 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 worldwide fellowship. More and more Local Spiritual Assemblies are becoming strong focal centers 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 fulfillment 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 meagerness 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 Center 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 Center 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 Counselors 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 Counselors 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 reestablished.
- 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 traveling 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 neighboring 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 Counselors, 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 endeavor, 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 vigor 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 splendor will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

Naw-Rúz 1979

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

In the message of The Universal House of Justice to The Bahá'ís of the World and in its letters to individual communities setting the goals of the first phase of the Seven Year Plan are a number of references which it wishes to amplify for your guidance. Not all will apply to every national Bahá'í community, but you will all undoubtedly find interest in reading even those which do not immediately apply to your specific situation. The points we have been asked to set forth are as follows.

**Local Spiritual Assemblies**

In August 1970 the House of Justice sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies a compilation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on the Local Spiritual Assembly. To supplement this fundamental and most important guidance we now enclose a compilation of extracts from the letters of The Universal House of Justice written between 1966 and 1975, covering the importance of Local Spiritual Assemblies, their development, the supporting role of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and suggested goals for Local Assemblies.

In selecting goal towns for the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies a National Assembly should ensure that there will be a wide distribution of Local Assemblies throughout the country.

National Assemblies should consider calling upon every Local Assembly to meet at least once every Bahá'í month, and to appoint a local teaching committee wherever it is desirable to do so and has not already been done.

**Pioneers and Traveling Teachers**

The need for the services of pioneers and traveling teachers remains very great. In the goals for the initial two-year phase of the Plan few specific assignments for the sending of pioneers and traveling teachers have been made. In recent years a steady stream has begun to flow, and The Universal House of Justice calls upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the stronger national communities to arise to join this stream. Enclosed are two lists showing those countries which are particularly in need of pioneers and traveling teachers at

the present time. You should publish these as soon as possible. They are also being supplied to the Continental Pioneer Committees, and those friends who arise will be able to decide upon their area of service in consultation with their National Assembly and the appropriate committees. The international funds of the Faith are now very limited, and this adds to the need for pioneers and traveling teachers to be self-supporting.

### **Youth Teaching**

Experience has shown that youth can render valuable service in many activities of the community, and particularly in taking the message to the members of their own generation. Those in schools and universities have many opportunities to teach their fellow students and faculty members, and many can be particularly effective by attending a school or university in a pioneer goal. During vacations youth can often render outstanding services as traveling teachers. Traveling in teams has been very useful.

### **Border Teaching**

It is very important that there be collaborative teaching between national Bahá'í communities in border areas, both by travel teaching across the border and in the organization of joint teaching campaigns on both sides of it. Each National Spiritual Assembly should study this possibility and, if it finds such projects profitable, should seek the collaboration of its sister National Assemblies and request the advice and assistance of the Continental Board of Counselors.

### **Teaching Conferences**

These conferences, whether national or regional, in addition to providing good opportunities for fanning the enthusiasm of the friends and fostering their unity, have been effectively used by many National Assemblies as working conferences where reports are given of the status of the goals of the Plan and of the urgent needs and priorities; and, where necessary, calls are raised for pioneers, traveling teachers and funds.

### **Summer and Winter Schools**

The Guardian once described the institution of the Summer School in a letter written on his behalf, as "a vital and inseparable part of any teaching campaign." In April 1972 the House of Justice issued a compilation on the importance of Bahá'í Summer Schools, and it commends this to every National Spiritual Assembly for study. In only a few countries has it been possible or timely to acquire properties to house Summer and Winter Schools; in most they are still held in rented premises, and the House of Justice stresses the importance of holding them at as low a cost as possible in a place that is easily accessible to the friends, so that large numbers of believers and inquirers can attend. It is hoped that this activity will become at least an annual feature of the Bahá'í community life in every land.

### **The Bahá'í Education of Children**

It is important to hold regular Bahá'í children's classes to give the children a thorough grounding in knowledge of the teachings and history of the Faith, to imbue them with its spirit, to establish loving ties



between them and to provide them with that firm foundation in the Faith which will enable them to grow up as staunch and enlightened servants of Bahá'u'lláh. Non-Bahá'í parents will often welcome the opportunity of having their children take part in such classes, and this, in addition to the benefit it confers upon the children, may well be a means of attracting their parents to the Faith.

### **Tutorial Schools**

This is a term, originally adopted in the Bahá'í community of India, to describe the simple type of school, organized and conducted under the auspices of the Bahá'í administrative institutions, wherein one teacher is employed to conduct classes in reading and writing and elementary subjects for the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í children in a village. In addition to the academic subjects he also conducts Bahá'í classes for the children and, in his spare time, makes a valuable contribution to the teaching and consolidation work in his own and neighboring Bahá'í communities. The school may be held in the open air, in one of the houses of the Bahá'ís, in the local Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, or in a simple building constructed for the purpose, as conditions allow.

The teacher's salary as well as the other costs of the school are provided out of fees paid by the parents, supplemented, if necessary and possible, by allocations from the local or national funds.

In the Tablet of the World Bahá'u'lláh states that "Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice." In many countries this duty is fulfilled through the taxes that the government levies for the support of the state educational system, but there are other lands where no such facilities are provided and the Local Spiritual Assemblies may well begin to fulfill this aspect of their duties by encouraging the local friends to contribute to a special education fund which can be used for the support of tutorial schools or to assist the children of indigent believers to obtain schooling.

### **Publications**

Every National Spiritual Assembly should have a well conceived plan for the provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature for the believers and for the teaching work. In translation and publication, priority should be given to the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, for without access to the life-giving waters of the Holy Word, how are the believers to deepen in their understanding of the Teachings and convey them accurately to others?

### **Recordings**

In addition to the publication of Texts and teaching materials for the friends, it would be helpful in areas where the degree of literacy is not high, to find ways to teach the friends Bahá'í songs, poems, stories and brief quotations from the Writings as well as prayers. This can be done through the use of cassette tapes or radio broadcasts.

The goal given to certain national communities to make recordings of the Holy Texts is not intended to imply the large-scale production of cassette tapes but rather the development of locally based programs for the recording on cassette tapes of passages in the indigenous languages. Such tapes can then be carried by traveling teachers to outlying areas, used in the teaching work, or left behind if there are tape-recorders locally available.

### **Communications**

Keeping the friends informed of the news of the Faith is so important that every National Assembly is urged to devote attention to the prompt and regular dissemination of its national newsletter, supplemented, where necessary and feasible, by regional and local news organs. Some National Assemblies have also found that cassette recordings can be useful for communicating with friends in outlying areas, and radio programs can, of course, fulfill a similar purpose.

### **Correspondence Courses**

Such courses have proved their usefulness both for teaching the Faith and deepening the knowledge of the believers, and their production has been given as a goal to some national communities. If any National Assembly assigned this goal is not certain how to proceed, it may consult with the Continental Board of Counselors or write to The Universal House of Justice which will put it in touch with those National Assemblies most likely to be able to help.

### **Properties**

Many properties have already been acquired in the course of previous plans. It is important that these properties be properly maintained in good repair. National Spiritual Assemblies should set aside sums annually in their budgets for the maintenance of national properties so that when a repair becomes necessary the funds will be available without creating a sudden crisis for the national fund. As far as possible, local Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds and other local properties should be kept up by the local friends themselves.

It is also important to make full use of the properties of the Faith for the purposes for which they were acquired. Well maintained and regularly used properties will not only be a means of fostering Bahá'í community life, but will add to the prestige and dignity of the Faith in the eyes of the non-Bahá'í public.

A number of properties called for in the Five Year Plan, such as district and local Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds and local endowments, have not yet been acquired, usually as a result of local circumstances beyond the control of the friends. These goals should continue to be diligently pursued so that they will be attained as soon as conditions permit. If there are insuperable difficulties which make such a property unobtainable in the foreseeable future, a full report should be sent to The Universal House of Justice.

For goals requiring the acquisition of additional local Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds during the initial phase of the Seven Year Plan, no budget has been provided for assistance from the International Fund.

The Universal House of Justice is eagerly anticipating an upsurge of activity in the years ahead, and assures you all of its fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the rapid progress of all aspects of the new Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

23 May 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Since you were last informed of the recent events in the Cradle of the Faith, news has been received of further persecutions directed against the beloved and steadfast friends.

Historic sites of the Faith, Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds of local communities, and other Bahá'í properties in several provinces of Iran have been seized and occupied by forces of the new revolutionary government. Among the more sacred of these properties are the Most Holy House of the Báb in Shiraz, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be a place of pilgrimage for His followers and regarded by them as the most hallowed Spot in that land, the Síyáh-Chál and two ancestral Houses of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran and Tákur. Ominous signs of the intensification of active repression of the Faith are becoming evident, and the defenseless and vulnerable Persian Bahá'í community faces mounting perils to its Holy Places, institutions, properties and even the lives of its members.

We call on all believers in every land to offer special prayers for the protection of the Faith and the believers in Iran on the forthcoming anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb, on 9 July 1979, supplicating that through God's loving grace this fresh wave of persecution may not seriously harm the interests of His Cause, and that He may remove the obstacles from the path of the friends, and provide the means for the protection of the Holy Places and institutions of His Faith.

As soon as the Secretariat of your Assembly receives this letter, immediate steps should be taken to inform all the friends under your jurisdiction of the contents of the letter so that as many believers as possible in every land may participate in this day of prayer on behalf of their beleaguered brethren in Iran.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

15 June 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to the letter of the House of Justice to you of May 23rd, the situation in Persia continues to be a cause for deep concern and the friends and Holy Places in the country are in serious danger. We have been directed by the House of Justice to inform you of the following developments in the Cradle of our Faith.

An order has been issued by the authorities requiring the Umaná Company to cease functioning under its Bahá'í manager and to operate henceforth under a new non-Bahá'í management. This company holds on behalf of the Bahá'í community all the properties of the Faith, including the Holy Places. This step is ominous in its implications as it forebodes total confiscation of all our properties, including Bahá'í cemeteries. A similar step has been taken in respect to the Bahá'í hospital in Tehran, known as the Mítháqíyyih Hospital.

As a result of the recent disturbances, local revolutionary committees in Iran have instigated, in rural areas, the looting of the homes of several hundred Bahá'í families and the deprivation of their means of livelihood. Although a partial restitution of these properties has taken place, adequate compensation for the losses sustained by the Bahá'ís has yet to be made.

Efforts are made to silence the religious conscience of the Bahá'ís, as they are threatened with dismissal from their jobs and loss of their retirement allowances if they refuse to recant their Faith.

Shirkat-i-Nawnahálán, a commercial company of sixty years' standing, in which over 15,000 Bahá'ís have shares and investments, is occupied, its assets frozen, and its staff prevented from work, and denied their salaries. This action contradicts public proclamations of the new regime as well as accepted international standards.

The proposed drafts of the new constitution as published in the press recognize three religious minorities but omit mention of the Bahá'ís, in spite of the fact that they are the largest religious minority in the country.

The true aims and principles of the Faith are being maliciously misrepresented by a group of fanatical Shi'ah fundamentalists, established over twenty years ago, and one of whose chief aims has been and is to harass the Bahá'í community in Iran. This group is presently spreading false allegations against the Bahá'ís, unjustly accusing them of being enemies of Islam, agents of Zionism and political tools of the previous regime. Such allegations have aroused the passions of uninformed mobs, and created misunderstandings with the authorities. As the Bahá'ís are not a recognized entity in Iran, they have no opportunity to deny or disprove these false accusations....

One of the Persian friends has also written to the House of Justice a eulogy of the spirit of his fellow-believers at this moment of deep agitation and turmoil in the Cradle of our Faith. A copy of extracts from his letter is enclosed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Extracts from a Report of One of  
the Friends from Persia

The enemies of the Faith, filled with hatred and cruelty, have once again attacked the wronged and homeless believers and the Bahá'í properties. They are truly the return of their bloodthirsty predecessors. The friends have encountered such persecution and have manifested such courage and steadfastness that in every detail they have become the return of the martyrs and the heroes of the Cause of God. The events of history have become alive once again and are reoccurring. No day passes without the shedding of tears of blood and the anguish of hearts. The news of sad events, like a weighty hammer continually descends upon the Bahá'ís. No pen is able to describe the degree of afflictions and difficulties inflicted upon these wronged believers.

About 2,000 men, women, children and youth have sought refuge in the mountains and deserts and live in tents. They have spent many cold and rainy days in the caves of the mountains. Many are injured with broken arms and legs. The small children have lost their ability to talk, having been frightened so much because of the incidents, and the milk of the nursing mothers has dried up. These believers, without having any means of livelihood, pass their days with utmost difficulty and are banished from place to place.

When the believers, hungry and grief-stricken, had gathered together in the wilderness, the enemies sent them chilaw-kabáb (kabáb with rice) to win their hearts. But those beloved ones did not accept the food and returned it. It is easy to say or write these words, but the bearing of these afflictions is only possible through the power of God. Those few who have denied their faith have escaped to Isfahan, crying and lamenting that they were threatened with the raping of the women of their households. They sit and cry for hours saying they did not know what else to do.

This is only a glimpse into one incident. Every day, from every corner, there is another cry of grief. The Ḥazratu'l-Quds of Abádih, where the heads of the early martyrs of the Faith have been buried, has been

leveled to the dust. Many other Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds have been destroyed. The number of Bahá'ís in prisons for one reason or another has increased to 20. Many have been discharged from their jobs. Many have lost their retirement allowances. The Ministry of Education has officially sent a circular that those Bahá'ís who do not deny their faith should be immediately discharged.

Facing these difficulties, in the midst of the darkness of this oppression and tyranny, are the illumined faces of the National Spiritual Assembly members: the sources of hope. Truly they are angels of God; no, more exalted. Every minute of their lives deserves the reward of a martyr, and each one of them, the reward of a thousand martyrs. They are the personification of steadfastness, courage, and sacrifice, with nothing but the service of the Cause in their hearts and souls. Whenever I looked upon the faces of these illuminated and beloved ones in the meetings of the Assembly, my tears would uncontrollably pour from my eyes.

There are many such examples amongst the Auxiliary Board members, members of the Assemblies and the youth. Truly, the new creations of God are beyond our imaginations. Unless one witnesses such events in person, the extent of the sacrifice and steadfastness that these friends have manifested cannot be comprehended.

Whenever I witnessed what befell these believers, the words of God would find meaning in front of my eyes. I had looked up the meaning of these words in the dictionaries, but I did not know that in addition to their obvious meaning they describe, or better even, create new realities. Now that the tempest of trials and afflictions has encircled the community of the beloved ones, the believers who have remained behind and who steadfastly and firmly are bearing the burden of this storm, only can sing the eternal epic of the second century of the Faith. Truly, all of them are the children and descendants of those who watered the tree of the Faith with their pure blood. This tree is still bearing fruit, is still growing! What a glory! What a glory!

There is so much to say and tell, but the mental anguish is so severe, the conditions are so dark and confused, and the outpouring of the difficulties so abundant that my tongue is not able to utter a word and my mind is bewildered. I can only cry. May my soul be sacrificed for the faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh who have created the greatest epic in the history of the second century of this new Day. One of the guards who had gone to the house of one of the friends had told her that he could not believe the forbearance and patience of the Bahá'ís and had asked how we could ever do it!

These are events to remember. Whenever the bloodthirsty enemies or others have returned a part of the looted belongings of the Bahá'ís, they have refused to accept them, crying that they will not take back what they have given in the path of God. One of the friends ... lost absolutely everything, and refusing the help of the Assembly on the grounds that there were many more needy than he, started to work as a laborer to make a living for his family. He could not bring himself to accept any help whatever from non-Bahá'ís, or to tell of his situation to friends. A friend related that when he saw him, he was so touched that his knees could no more bear the weight of his body.

And yet another story. A believer who had incurred a loss of Rls. 170,000,000, wrote on the questionnaire form of the Assembly that he did not need any help! When everything is gone with the wind, only faith remains.

At present thousands of friends in Iran have lost everything, or have lost their jobs and are meeting their expenses by the sale of their belongings. And then there are those who are fleeing from one place to another and in grave danger. This is only the beginning of the journey of love, and its end is not known.

For five months the National Spiritual Assembly has been meeting at least three or four times a week, for about six to eight continuous hours each time, and devotes 90 per cent of its time to discussion of urgent matters relating to the situation.

The staff of the Nawnahálán Company have not received their salaries for three months now and about 40 families are affected by this situation. Many other families who had given whatever they had to the Nawnahálán Company and were dependent on the interest received to pay for their expenses, are left without any income. All petitions and complaints have remained unanswered. Whatever was lost is lost and nothing has been recovered.

God willing, I will write a book instead of a letter and present it to you so that perhaps a drop of this ocean of difficulties may be recorded. The request of this servant and every one of the believers is to express our servitude and beseech the House of Justice for its prayers in the Holy Shrines. From whomever I asked whether they had any special request to be conveyed to you, I was told to beg for your prayers that God may give them the power and worthiness to accept and bear the difficulties.



The Universal House of Justice

29 June 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

MOMENT PROPITIOUS ANNOUNCE DURATION TERMS SERVICE MEMBERS CONTINENTAL BOARDS  
COUNSELORS AS ANTICIPATED IN ANNOUNCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT THAT INSTITUTION AND IN  
CONSTITUTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE. DECISION NOW TAKEN THAT TERMS WILL BE OF  
FIVE YEARS STARTING DAY COVENANT 26 NOVEMBER 1980. SUPPLICATING ANCIENT BEAUTY  
DIVINE BLESSINGS DEVELOPMENT THIS ESSENTIAL INSTITUTION BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE  
ORDER.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

9 September 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

PERSECUTION OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS, THE LARGEST RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN IRAN, HAS TAKEN A NEW TURN. EARLY YESTERDAY MORNING A CROWD OF OVER 100 PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT FOR RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENTS IN SHIRAZ, AND ACCOMPANIED BY 25 REVOLUTIONARY GUARDSMEN AND 10 OTHER ARMED MEN, ATTACKED THE MOST HOLY HOUSE OF THE BÁB WHICH WAS ORDAINED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, THE FOUNDER OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH, TO BE A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE FOR HIS FOLLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND IS REGARDED BY THEM AS THE MOST HALLOWED SPOT IN IRAN. THIS CROWD, WHICH HAD THE KEY TO THE HOUSE, SMASHED AND DISMANTLED DOORS AND WINDOWS, DESTROYED ORNAMENTAL PLASTERWORK, BREACHED THE WALLS AND HACKED TO PIECES A TREE IN THE COURTYARD. THIS MORNING THE WORK OF DEMOLITION IS BEING CONTINUED BY A GROUP OF WORKMEN AND IT IS CLEAR THAT THE PURPOSE IS TO RAZE TO THE GROUND THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB AND TWO ADJACENT HOUSES WHICH ALSO BELONG TO THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY.

A WAVE OF ANGUISHED INDIGNATION IS SWEEPING THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. WHEN ALL BAHÁ'Í HOLY PLACES IN IRAN WERE SEIZED BY THE AUTHORITIES IN RECENT MONTHS, THE PROTESTATIONS OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS WERE MET WITH BLAND ASSURANCES, CONFIRMED IN WRITING, THAT THE TAKEOVER WAS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THESE SACRED PROPERTIES.

BAHÁ'ÍS IN EAST AND WEST ARE REGISTERING VEHEMENT PROTESTS WITH THE IRANIAN AUTHORITIES.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

17 October 1979

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to send you the attached material...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

IRANIAN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES OUTSIDE IRAN HAVE APPARENTLY ADOPTED A UNIFORM STAND IN THEIR REPLIES TO APPEALS BEING MADE ON BEHALF OF THE IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS. THEY SAY THAT BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN, UNLIKE BAHÁ'ÍS ELSEWHERE, HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN POLITICS, CONSPIRED WITH AND WERE FAVORED AND SUPPORTED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME, AND WERE PROMINENT MEMBERS OF SAVAK. IN SUPPORT OF THESE STATEMENTS THESE OFFICIALS NAME AS BAHÁ'ÍS: FORMER PRIME MINISTER ABBAS AMIR HOVEIDA, A FORMER MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE MANSOUR ROUHANI, A SAVAK SENIOR OFFICER PARVIZ SABETI, AND THE PHYSICIAN TO THE SHAH DR. AYADI.

THE FACTS ARE THAT HOVEIDA'S GRANDFATHER WAS A BAHÁ'Í, HIS FATHER WAS EXPELLED FROM THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY BECAUSE HE BECAME INVOLVED IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND HOVEIDA HIMSELF WAS NEVER A BAHÁ'Í. ROUHANI'S FATHER WAS A BAHÁ'Í, HIS MOTHER A DEVOUT MUSLIM, BUT ROUHANI WAS NEVER A BAHÁ'Í. SABETI'S PARENTS WERE BAHÁ'ÍS, AND THEY REGISTERED HIM IN THE COMMUNITY AS A BAHÁ'Í CHILD. HOWEVER, WHEN HE CAME OF AGE HE DID NOT HIMSELF REGISTER AS A BAHÁ'Í AND NEVER BECAME A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY. UNLIKE CHILDREN OF OTHER RELIGIONS, BAHÁ'Í CHILDREN DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY INHERIT THE FAITH OF THEIR PARENTS. WHEN THEY COME OF AGE THEY MUST OF THEIR OWN VOLITION EXPRESS THEIR BELIEF IN BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND HIS TEACHINGS. DR. AYADI, HOWEVER, IS A BAHÁ'Í. HE HELD TWO POSITIONS: ONE AS DIRECTOR OF THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICE, THE OTHER AS PRIVATE PHYSICIAN OF THE COURT. NEITHER OF THESE TWO POSITIONS WAS REGARDED BY THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AS POLITICAL IN NATURE.

ALTHOUGH SOME BAHÁ'ÍS WITH UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS WERE PLACED IN POSITIONS OF TRUST BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY AND INTEGRITY, IT IS NOT TRUE TO SAY THAT BAHÁ'ÍS WERE FAVORED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY WERE DENIED CIVIL RIGHTS, SUCH AS PERMISSION

TO REGISTER THEIR BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGES, PRIVILEGE TO HOLD BAHÁ'Í RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENTS IN NAME OF BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY, AND FREEDOM TO PUBLISH BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE OR ESTABLISH BAHÁ'Í SCHOOLS (INDEED DURING THE REIGN OF MUHAMMAD REZA SHAH'S FATHER, OVER THIRTY BAHÁ'Í SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WERE PERMANENTLY CLOSED). MANY OF RANK AND FILE OF BAHÁ'ÍS WERE DENIED JOBS AND SOMETIMES EVEN THEIR RIGHTS TO PENSIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR REFUSAL TO DENY THEIR FAITH.

AS TO THE ALLEGED ROLE OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN SAVAK, THIS IS LIKEWISE UNTRUE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN JANUARY 1979, THROUGH THE MACHINATIONS OF SAVAK, AN ORDER WAS GIVEN TO SYSTEMATICALLY LOOT AND BURN OR OTHERWISE DESTROY HUNDREDS OF HOMES OF BAHÁ'ÍS. THIS IS A FACT ATTESTED TO BY MUSLIM CLERICS BELONGING TO THE PRESENT REGIME WHO, DURING THAT PERIOD OF TERROR AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS, WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO TRY TO DISSUADE THE MOBS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THE SAVAK PLAN, SINCE THE CLERGY KNEW THAT THE AIM OF THIS PLAN WAS TO GIVE EXCUSE TO SAVAK TO DISCREDIT AND SUPPRESS THEM.

SUMMARIZING THE FOREGOING—IT IS FEARED THAT THE PRESENT REGIME, AS INDICATED BY THE SIMILARITY OF THE STATEMENTS BEING GIVEN OUT BY IRANIAN DIPLOMATIC AGENCIES, IS ATTEMPTING TO JUSTIFY ACTIONS BEING TAKEN AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS BY ASSERTING THAT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IS NOT A RELIGION BUT A POLITICAL PARTY, AND THAT THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY SUPPORTED THE PREVIOUS REGIME AND THEREBY BECAME POWERFUL AND WEALTHY. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER CAN BE FOUND IN THE BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF COMPLETE ABSTENTION FROM PARTICIPATION IN PARTISAN POLITICS WHICH WAS DEMONSTRATED IN IRAN IN 1975 WHEN BAHÁ'ÍS EVEN IN THE FACE OF THREATS REFUSED TO BECOME MEMBERS OF THE RASTAKHIZ PARTY PROMOTED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME. IN ONE CASE WHEN A BAHÁ'Í ACCEPTED A CABINET POST UNDER DURESS HE WAS DEPRIVED OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. AS TO THE ALLEGATION THAT THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY REAPED FINANCIAL REWARD BECAUSE OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME THE FACT IS THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS ARE OF THE POORER CLASSES LIVING IN VILLAGES. FEW ARE WEALTHY, AND AMONG THEM A NUMBER WERE BUSINESSMEN WHO PROVIDED FACILITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS. THE FEW WHO RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY ARE BEING ACCUSED OF CORRUPTION AND OTHER OFFENSES SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. IT IS AN INJUSTICE TO HOLD ANY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ILL-DOINGS OF ANY ONE OF ITS MEMBERS WHO FAILS TO REFLECT THE PRINCIPLES PROMULGATED BY THAT RELIGION.

AS THE NEW CONSTITUTION MAKES NO REFERENCE TO THE BAHÁ'ÍS, WAYS AND MEANS SHOULD BE SOUGHT TO EXTEND TO THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF ITS INTERESTS, AND TO ENSURE FOR ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS BASIC CIVIL RIGHTS THUS AVOIDING FRICTION AND FRUSTRATION IN SUCH OFT-RECURRING PERSONAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGES AND BIRTHS, EMPLOYMENT, TRAVELING DOCUMENTS, ETC.

UNLESS THESE DISABILITIES CURRENTLY AFFLICTING IRAN'S LARGEST RELIGIOUS MINORITY ARE REMEDIED, FANATICAL ELEMENTS WILL BE GIVEN FREE REIN TO REPEATEDLY RESORT TO MOB

VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS, EMBARRASSING THE GOVERNMENT AND PREVENTING HOPED-FOR PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY IN THAT COUNTRY....

ONE OF THE OFT-REPEATED ACCUSATIONS AGAINST BAHÁ'ÍS IS THAT THEY ARE ENEMIES OF ISLAM. THIS CHARGE ASSUMES NOW NEW PROPORTIONS AS MANY RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES IN NEW CONSTITUTION APPLY ONLY IF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES CONCERNED ARE NOT REGARDED AS ANTI-ISLAMIC. HENCE OFFICIAL BRANDING BAHÁ'Í FAITH AS ANTI-ISLAMIC MAY BE CONVENIENT DEVICE TO DENY BAHÁ'ÍS ESSENTIAL HUMAN RIGHTS. FURTHERMORE, SOMETIMES DISTINCTION IS MADE BETWEEN BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND OTHER RELIGIONS BY STATING THAT OUR FAITH APPEARED AFTER ISLAM AND THEREFORE IS NOT CONSIDERED BY MUSLIMS AS A RELIGION ENTITLED TO RIGHTS OF OTHER RELIGIONS. SUCH THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES SHOULD NOT BE CAUSE DENIAL CIVIL RIGHTS. SAME SITUATION APPLIES TO MUSLIMS WHO RESIDE IN CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES, AND ENJOY FULL RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS.

REGARDING PROPERTIES HELD BY UMANÁ COMPANY: THESE PROPERTIES CONSIST PRIMARILY OF BAHÁ'Í HOLY AND HISTORICAL SITES HELD IN TRUST BY IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS ON BEHALF THEIR CORELIGIONISTS THROUGHOUT WORLD AS WELL AS PROPERTIES OF PURELY RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE SUCH AS TEMPLE LAND, COMMUNITY CENTERS AND CEMETERIES AND MANY OF THESE HAVE BEEN IN BAHÁ'Í POSSESSION FOR OVER A CENTURY.

REGARDING NAWNAHÁLÁN: THIS COMPANY WAS FOUNDED PRIOR TO RULE PAHLAVI DYNASTY. OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF FIFTEEN THOUSAND BAHÁ'ÍS WHO HAVE SHARES AND INVESTMENTS IN COMPANY ARE NOT OF WEALTHY CLASS, AND DEPEND FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD ON INCOME THEY WERE DERIVING FROM THEIR ASSETS IN THE COMPANY....

### **The Universal House of Justice**

[AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

10 February 1980

To the dear Iranian believers resident in other countries throughout the world

In these tumultuous days when the lovers of the Best Beloved are remote from their homeland, associated with their fellow-believers in other lands, and participating in the services of the loyal supporters throughout the world, we felt it necessary to convey our thoughts to those distinguished friends, with absolute sincerity and affection, and invite them to that which we believe can guarantee their tranquillity and happiness, as well as their eternal salvation and redemption, so that with firm

steps and sure hearts they may, God willing, withstand the onslaughts which have and will afflict all the countries of the globe. Thus they may fix their gaze on the dawn of the fulfillment of the soul-vitalizing promises of God and remain certain that behind these dark clouds the Sun of the Will of God is shining resplendent from its height of glory and might. Before long these dark clouds of contention, negligence, fanaticism, and rebellion shall disperse, the day of victory shall dawn above the horizon, and a new age shall illumine the world. It should not be surmised that the events which have taken place in all corners of the globe, including the sacred land of Iran, have occurred as isolated incidents without any aim and purpose. According to the words of our beloved Guardian, "The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God." This is but one of the mysterious forces of this supreme Revelation which is causing the limbs of mankind to quake and those who are drunk with pride and negligence to be thunderstruck and shaken. To the truth of this testifies the sacred verse: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order," and the repeated warnings of the Pen of the Most High, such as:

The world is encircled with calamities. Even if at times some good may be evident, it is inevitable that a great calamity followeth—and yet no one on earth hath perceived its origin.

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then and only then will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.

Similarly, the Pen of the Center of the Covenant has repeatedly prophesied the intolerable calamities which must beset this wayward humanity ere it heeds the life-giving Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings, the source of life on earth.

Every discerning eye clearly sees that the early stages of this chaos have daily manifestations affecting the structure of human society; its destructive forces are uprooting time-honored institutions which were a haven and refuge for the inhabitants of the earth in bygone days and centuries, and around which revolved all human affairs. The same destructive forces are also deranging the political, economic, scientific, literary, and moral equilibrium of the world and are destroying the fairest fruits of the present civilization. Political machinations of those in authority have placed the seal of obsolescence upon the root principles of the world's order. Greed and passion, deceit, hypocrisy, tyranny, and pride are dominating features afflicting human relations. Discoveries and inventions, which are the fruit of scientific and technological advancements, have become the means and tools of mass extermination and destruction and are in the hands of the ungodly. Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the noblest

sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquillity for troubled souls, have strayed from the straight path and are now the mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused, unprincipled, and disordered age. Perversions such as these shall result in the ordeals which have been prophesied by the Blessed Beauty in the following words: "... the earth will be tormented by a fresh calamity every day and unprecedented commotions will break out." "The day is approaching when its [civilization's] flame will devour the cities."

In such an afflicted time, when mankind is bewildered and the wisest of men are perplexed as to the remedy, the people of Bahá, who have confidence in His unfailing grace and divine guidance, are assured that each of these tormenting trials has a cause, a purpose, and a definite result, and all are essential instruments for the establishment of the immutable Will of God on earth. In other words, on the one hand humanity is struck by the scourge of His chastisement which will inevitably bring together the scattered and vanquished tribes of the earth; and on the other, the weak few whom He has nurtured under the protection of His loving guidance are, in this Formative Age and period of transition, continuing to build amidst these tumultuous waves an impregnable stronghold which will be the sole remaining refuge for those lost multitudes. Therefore, the dear friends of God who have such a broad and clear vision before them are not perturbed by such events, nor are they panic-stricken by such thundering sounds, nor will they face such convulsions with fear and trepidation, nor will they be deterred, even for a moment, from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities.

One of their sacred responsibilities is to exemplify in their lives those attributes which are acceptable at His Sacred Threshold. Others must inhale from them the holy fragrances of the homeland of Bahá'u'lláh, the land which is the birthplace of self-sacrificing martyrs and devoted lovers of the Omnipotent Lord. They must not forget that Bahá'ís throughout the world expect much from the Iranian believers. They should hearken to the life-giving clarion call which their Peerless Beloved has given to the friends in Iran:

The wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that which attracts His good pleasure, and, indeed, His binding command, is that Bahá'ís, in all matters, even in small daily transactions and dealings with others, should act in accordance with the divine Teachings. He has commanded us not to be content with lowliness, humility and meekness, but rather to become manifestations of selflessness and utter nothingness. Of old, all have been exhorted to loyalty and fidelity, compassion and love; in this supreme Dispensation, the people of Bahá are called upon to sacrifice their very lives. Notice the extent to which the friends have been required in the Sacred Epistles and Tablets, as well as in our Beloved's Testament, to be righteous, well-wishing, forbearing, sanctified, pure, detached from all else save God, severed from the trappings of this world and adorned with the mantle of a goodly character and godly attributes.

First and foremost, one should use every possible means to purge one's heart and motives, otherwise, engaging in any form of enterprise would be futile. It is also essential to abstain from hypocrisy and blind imitation, inasmuch as their foul odor is soon detected by every man of understanding and wisdom. Moreover, the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay impossible, for any enterprise to prosper and develop when deprived of divine bestowals and confirmation. One can hardly imagine what a

great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he makes a daily effort to gain them. Let not the stranger, the envious and the enemy have cause to attribute the sublimity of the Faith in the past and in its early days to the appearance of outstanding and sanctified souls and the perseverance of martyrs whose absence today implies the necessary decline, weakening, scattering and annihilation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

We beseech God to aid and assist them daily to center their attentions on these divine admonitions and to tread the path of faithfulness so as to secure abiding happiness.

Another of the sacred responsibilities of the believers is their spiritual commitment to serve God's Sacred Threshold at all times and under all conditions so that they may dedicate the few, fleeting days of their lives—particularly in this age of transition—to the Cause of God, unmindful of the vicissitudes of fortune, trusting in Providence, and relieved of worries and anxieties. Witness what joyful tidings the Pen of the Most High has given to such blessed souls:

Whatsoever occurreth in the world of being is light for His loved ones and fire for the people of sedition and strife. Even if all the losses of the world were to be sustained by one of the friends of God, he would still profit thereby, whereas true loss would be borne by such as are wayward, ignorant and contemptuous. Although the author of the following saying had intended it otherwise, yet We find it pertinent to the operation of God's immutable Will: "Even or odd, thou shalt win the wager." The friends of God shall win and profit under all conditions, and shall attain true wealth. In fire they remain cold, and from water they emerge dry. Their affairs are at variance with the affairs of men. Gain is their lot, whatever the deal. To this testifieth every wise one with a discerning eye, and every fair-minded one with a hearing ear.

Yet another sacred duty is that of clinging to the cord of moderation in all things, lest they who are to be the essence of detachment and moderation be deluded by the trappings of this nether world or set their hearts on its adornments and waste their lives. If they are wealthy, they should make these bestowals a means of drawing nigh unto God's Threshold, rather than being so attached to them that they forget the admonitions of the Pen of the Most High. The Voice of Truth has said, "Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom." If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God's Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them. Turn to the Book of the Covenant, the Hidden Words, and other Tablets, lest the cord of your salvation become a rope of woe which will lead to your own destruction. How numerous are those negligent souls, particularly from among your own compatriots, who have been deprived of the blessings of faith and true understanding. Witness how, no sooner had they attained their newly amassed wealth and status, than they became so bewitched by them as to forget the virtues and true perfections of man's station. They clung to their empty and fruitless lifestyle. They had naught else but their homes, their commercial success, and their ornamental trappings of which to be proud. Behold their ultimate fate. Many a triumphal arch was reduced to a ruin, many an imperial palace was converted into a barn. Many a day of



deceit turned into a night of despair. Vast treasures changed hands and, at the end of their lives, they were left only with tears of loss and regret. "... all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure." Therefore the people of Bahá must not fall prey to the corruption of the ruthless, but rather cling to contentment and moderation. They must make their homes havens for the believers, folds for their gatherings and centers for the promulgation of His Cause and the diffusion of His love, so that people of all strata, whether high or low, may feel at home and be able to consort in an atmosphere of love and fellowship.

Another sacred responsibility of those dear Iranian friends now living abroad is to consult with the Assemblies and Bahá'í Institutions so that their settlement in needy areas may help the establishment and consolidation of the Faith. They must serve on the pioneer front wherever they reside. They must not allow themselves to be drawn to and congregate in areas where their relatives or friends reside, unaware of the pioneering needs of the Faith. Praised be God that, through the blessings of the Greatest Name, the believers have been imbued with a love and unity which transcends the ties of kinship and friendship and overcomes the barriers of language and culture. Therefore there is no need for the Iranian friends to congregate in one place. Often such a congregation creates problems. For example, should the number of Iranians exceed the number of native believers in a community, they would inadvertently bring about such difficulties as might hamper the progress of the Cause of God, and the world-conquering religion of the Abhá Beauty might appear to others as a religion which is limited and peculiar to Iranians. This could but lead to a waste of time and the disenchantment of both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís. Under such circumstances the dear Iranian friends would neither enjoy their stay in that place nor would they be able to serve the Faith in a befitting manner. It is our ardent hope that, wherever possible, the Iranian friends may settle in those towns or villages which are pioneering goals, so that through their stay the foundation of the Cause may be strengthened. They must encourage each other to pioneer and disperse in accordance with the teaching plans wherever they reside, and sacrifice the happiness and joy which they may otherwise obtain from companionship with each other for the sake of the vital interests of the Cause.

Another of the sacred duties incumbent upon the believers is that of avoiding participation in political discussions and intrigues which have become popular nowadays. What have the people of Bahá to do with political contention and controversy? With absolute certainty they must prove to the world that Bahá'ís, by virtue of their beliefs, are loyal citizens of whatever country they reside in and are far removed from the machinations of conspirators and the perpetrators of destruction and chaos. Their ideal is the happiness of all the peoples of the world and sincere and wholehearted service to them. In administrative positions they are obedient to their governments and carry out their duties with the utmost honesty and trustworthiness. They regard no faction as superior to another and prefer no individual above another. They oppose no one, for the Divine Pen has prohibited sedition and corruption and enjoined peace and harmony upon us. For more than a century Bahá'ís have proven by their deeds that they regard servitude and service to their fellowman as being more worthy than the privileges of power which can be gained from politics. In administering their own affairs, they rely on God rather than on the influence of those in power and authority. Particularly in these days when the enemies of the Faith have afflicted the Cause in the sacred land of Iran with the darts of calumny and slander on every side, the dear Iranian friends should be

vigilant, both in their contact with other Iranians abroad and with people in general, and behave in such a way as to leave no doubt as to the independence and nonalignment of the Bahá'ís and their good will to all people, whether in Iran or elsewhere. They must not give a new excuse to cause trouble to those mischief-makers who have always sought to further their own unworthy ends by making the Bahá'í community a target for their malicious accusations.

O beloved of God, and compatriots of the Abhá Beauty! Your relationship to the Blessed Perfection merits befitting gratitude. Having appreciated the true value of so inestimable a bounty, your forefathers regarded the offering of their lives in the path of their kind Beloved as easy to make. They were put in chains, became captives of the sword, lost their homes and belongings, yet no sound was heard from their lacerated throats but the cry of "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" and "Yá 'Alíyyu'l-A'lá." The vibration of the sound of that same soul-burning cry gradually noised abroad the call of this world-illuminating Great Announcement and the ringing notes of that call resounded in all regions of the world, and, now too, the beloved friends in Iran, who are the devoted dwellers in the courtyard of the Beloved, stand firm in the same Covenant and Testament. Behold the courage, firmness, detachment, unity, cooperation, zeal and enthusiasm with which these loyal lovers of the Beloved daily face their tests and prove and demonstrate to the world, with radiant and shining faces, their purity, their heritage, their quality, and their virtue. With the utmost meekness, truthfulness, wisdom, and courage they meet the challenges presented to them, the challenge of defying the enemies, dispelling misunderstandings which are a result of the proliferation of calumnies and false accusations. They have met their fate with acquiescence, have bowed their heads in the valley of submission and resignation, and have borne every tribulation with radiance, for they know with absolute certainty that the fulfillment of divine prophecies will coincide with dire events and the bearing of innumerable afflictions. The beloved Guardian says: "If in the days to come, adversities of various kinds should encircle that land and national upheavals should further aggravate the present calamities, and intensify the repeated afflictions," the dear friends in that country should not feel "sorrowful and grieved" and must not be deflected "from their straight path and chosen highway." He then continues to address the dear friends in these words:

The liberation of this meek and innocent band of His followers from the fetters of its bondage and the talons of the people of tyranny and enmity must needs be preceded by the clamor and agitation of the masses. The realization of glory, of tranquillity, and of true security for the people of Bahá will necessitate opposition, aggression and commotion on the part of the people of malevolence and iniquity. Therefore, should the buffeting waves of the sea of tribulation intensify and the storms of trials and tribulations assail that meek congregation from all six sides, know of a certainty and without a moment's hesitation that the time for their deliverance has drawn nigh, that the age-old promise of their assured glory will soon be fulfilled, and that at long last the means are provided for the persecuted people of Bahá in that land to attain salvation and supreme triumph. A firm step and an unshakable resolve are essential so that the remaining stages may come to pass and the cherished ideals of the people of Bahá may be realized on the loftiest summits, and be made manifest in astounding brilliance. "Such is God's method, and no change shalt thou find in His method."

That is why those royal falcons who soar in the firmament of God's love have arisen with such joy, tranquillity, and dignity that their serenity has become a magnet for the attraction of the confirmations of the Concourse on High and has brought such a resounding success to them as has astonished and startled the people of Bahá throughout the world. Others have been inspired by the example of those treasured brethren to renew their pledge to their All-Glorious Beloved and to serve His Sacred Threshold with high endeavor. Thus they endeavor, as far as possible, to make good the temporary disability of the believers in Iran. Inspired by the courage, constancy, sincerity, and devotion of those enamored friends in the path of their Beloved, they are increasing their services and renewing and strengthening their resolve so that they may arise in the arena of the love of God as it beseems true lovers. That is why in these days the followers of the Greatest Name in different parts of the world have undertaken to win new victories in remembrance and on behalf of their dear friends in Iran. They have made new plans and their efforts have been confirmed with resounding success, which they attribute to the influences of the high endeavors and the constancy of the friends in the Cradle of the Faith. What then will you do, dear friends who come from that sacred land of Iran? You are the birds of that rose garden. You should sing such a song that the hearts of others will rejoice with gladness. You are the candles of that Divine Sanctuary. You should shed such a light that it will illumine the eyes of the intimates of God's mysteries. Our eager hearts in these days are expectant to see the rays of loyalty and integrity from amidst these dark and threatening clouds, so that your blessed names, like those of your self-sacrificing compatriots, may be recorded in gold upon the Tablet of Honor. This is dependent upon your own high endeavor.

[signed: 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, Raḥmatu'lláh Muhájir and Ḥasan Balyúzí 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 Sýyáh-Chál and Bahá'u'lláh's Home in Tehran 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 Tehran have been kidnapped and the whereabouts of two of them is still unknown, while the third is still in prison. Also, a Counselor and some friends who are associated with the National Office or are members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran 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 Counselors 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 ardor and self-sacrifice to the promotion of the work to which all the Hands of the Cause of God have dedicated their lives.

The worldwide 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! ERELONG SHALL THE CLAMOR 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 vigor, 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 Center 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 Ḥaram-i-Aqdas at Bahjí, and the initiation of a general reorganization of the work of the World Center 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 worldwide community of the Most Great Name in over 106,000 localities, all testify to the unassailable, and indeed ever-increasing vigor of the Cause of God.

The number of pioneers and traveling 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 traveling 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 Ríḍván 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 Ríḍván 1980. At Ríḍván 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 reformation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda, to take place at Ríḍván 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 endeavor 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 endeavors 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 marvelous 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 defense of their persecuted brethren and their shouldering of the load which must, at all costs, be borne.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

7 May 1980

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 14 April 1980 enclosing the copy of that part of page 15 of the issue of the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* for 14 March 1980, on which the letter from Francesco Ficicchia was published.

The House of Justice feels that the best course is to ignore this disgraceful attack on the Faith, rather than to make any rebuttal. Your Assembly should, however, be prepared to answer any enquiries that you may receive as a result of this article, whether from Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís. To assist you in this, we enclose extracts from a letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice, which touch on matters raised by Mr. Ficicchia. You are also, no doubt, aware that a Russian translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by A. G. Tumansky was published in 1899. A translation of the complete text into English, made by two former Presbyterian missionaries in Iran, was published by The Royal Asiatic Society in 1961; it is accompanied by highly prejudiced and misleading footnotes and introduction, and the inadequacy of the translation itself is immediately apparent to anyone who compares passages with those that Shoghi Effendi translated. The existence of these two published translations, however, demonstrates the falsity of Ficicchia's statement that no complete translation exists. A far clearer understanding of the contents of the Most Holy Book, however, than given by either translation, is presented in the *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* which gives not only the laws of the Aqdas themselves, but also includes the elucidations given by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the "Questions and Answers," and contains many explanatory annotation provided by the House of Justice.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

27 May 1980

Extracts from a reply written on behalf of  
The Universal House of Justice to questions about



## the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

The institution of the Covenant has a direct bearing on the implementation of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This Book is the repository of the basic laws for the Dispensation to be implemented gradually in accordance with the guidance given by God through those infallible Institutions which lie at the heart of the Covenant. Indeed, one of those Institutions, The Universal House of Justice, has been given by Bahá'u'lláh the task not only of applying the laws but of supplementing them and of making laws on all matters not explicitly covered in the Sacred Text. An English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was made by Dr. Earl E. Elder and Dr. William McE. Miller, two men who were Presbyterian missionaries in Persia and have long been strongly antagonistic to the Faith. A great many of the statements that they make about its history are based on the assertions of Covenant-breakers or opponents of the Faith—rather like a history of Christianity based primarily on statements by enemies of Jesus Christ. Dr. Miller, for example, places great reliance on a document called the “Nuqṭatu'l-Káf,” which is, in fact, spurious, as is fully demonstrated by the Hand of the Cause Ḥasan Balyúzí in his book *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*.

The reasons for the delay in the translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are given in the introduction to the Synopsis and Codification. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself is the kernel of a vast structure of Bahá'í law that will have to come into being in the years and centuries ahead as the unity of mankind is established and develops. Thus to properly understand the contents of that Book one should also read many other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh relating to them, as well as the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, and realize that great areas of detail have been left by Bahá'u'lláh for The Universal House of Justice to fill in and to vary in accordance with the needs of a developing society. For example:

1. The law of divorce in the Aqdas seems to apply only to a husband divorcing his wife, and not vice versa. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian have made it quite clear that the principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh in the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” applies equally to men and women, and the law has always been implemented in this way. Such elucidations are one of the specific functions intended by Bahá'u'lláh for the authoritative Interpreter.
2. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas appears to allow bigamy. This is explained in Note 17 on page 59 of the Synopsis and Codification: “The text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas upholds monogamy, but as it appears also to permit bigamy, the Guardian was asked for a clarification, and in reply his secretary wrote on his behalf: ‘Regarding Bahá'í marriage: in the light of the Master's Tablet interpreting the provision in the Aqdas on the subject of the plurality of wives, it becomes evident that monogamy alone is permissible, since, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, bigamy is conditioned upon justice and as justice is impossible, it follows that bigamy is not permissible, and monogamy alone should be practiced.’”

This is an authoritative interpretation, and as an interpretation states what is intended by the original text, it is correct to say that the Kitáb-i-Aqdas prohibits plurality of wives. This method of establishing monogamy as the law of the Faith is one example of the process referred to in the introduction to the Synopsis and Codification whereby there is a progressive disclosure of the full meaning of the laws of the Faith as the Dispensation unfolds.

3. The punishments prescribed for theft, murder and arson are given only in barest outline. It is explained in Note 42 on page 64 of the Synopsis and Codification that these punishments are intended for a future condition of society and will have to be supplemented and applied by The Universal House of Justice. The punishment for theft, for example, says that for the third offense a mark must be placed on the thief's forehead (nothing is said about branding), so that people will be warned of his proclivities. All details of how the mark is to be applied, how long it must be worn, on what conditions it may be removed, as well as the seriousness of various degrees of theft have been left by Bahá'u'lláh for The Universal House of Justice to decide when the law has to be applied. Similarly, merely the fundamental principles of the punishments for murder and arson are given in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Willful murder is to be punished either by capital punishment or life imprisonment. Such matters as degrees of offense and whether any extenuating circumstances are to be taken into account, and which of the two prescribed punishments is to be the norm are left to The Universal House of Justice to decide in light of prevailing conditions when the law is in operation. Arson, as you yourself can see from the newspapers, is becoming an increasingly frequent offense—scarcely a day passes without some building being burned or blown up, often causing agonizing death to innocent people. Bahá'u'lláh prescribes that a person who burns a house intentionally is to be burned or imprisoned for life, but again, the application of these punishments, the method of carrying them out and the fixing of degrees of offense are left to The Universal House of Justice. Obviously there is a tremendous difference in the degree of the offense of a person who burns down an empty warehouse from that of one who sets fire to a school full of children.

From the above examples it should be clear why a translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas made without proper comprehensive footnotes referring to other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh which elucidate His laws as well as to interpretations made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, can give a very misleading impression—quite apart from the problem of achieving a beauty of style in the English which can approach that of the original, an aspect in which the Elder-Miller translation falls woefully short.

Although there is no explicit reference to the Guardianship in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Synopsis and Codification lists "Anticipation of the Institution of the Guardianship." On page 214 of God Passes By, when

summarizing the contents of the Aqdas, Shoghi Effendi states that in it Bahá'u'lláh “anticipates by implication the institution of Guardianship,” and again, on page 147 of *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* the Guardian refers to “the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the implications of which clearly anticipate the institution of the Guardianship.” One such implication is in the matter of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (The Right of God), which is ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas without provision being made for who is to receive it; in His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá fills this gap by stating “It is to be offered through the Guardian of the Cause of God ...” Other implications of this institution can be seen in the terms in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is appointed as the Successor of Bahá'u'lláh and the Interpreter of His Teachings. The faithful are enjoined to turn their faces towards the one whom “God hath purposed” and who “hath branched from this Ancient Root” and are bidden to refer whatsoever they do not understand in the Bahá'í writings to him who “hath branched from this mighty Stock.” Yet another can be seen in the provision of the Aqdas concerning the disposition of international endowments—a passage which not only refers this matter to the Aghṣán (male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh) but also provides for what should happen should the line of Aghṣán end before the coming into being of The Universal House of Justice. Thus the “Anticipation of the Institution of the Guardianship” is correctly included in the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

11 September 1980

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey to you the following...

An official statement published in Iran in the columns of newspapers of nationwide circulation charges that those executed [the seven martyrs of Yazd] were guilty of spying and subversion and denounces the Local Spiritual Assembly of Yazd as an instrument of espionage. These accusations are nothing but downright falsehood....

Recently the world press has carried several excellent articles written by fair-minded and well-known non-Bahá'í writers in support of our beloved Faith. *Le Monde* of Paris in its 29 August issue published a remarkable article earnestly defending the Bahá'í community in Iran. The Universal House of Justice has asked us to send you a copy of the article in French, with a translation of its text into English, for your information and use in any manner you deem advisable.

The situation of the friends in Iran is perilous. The total number of believers imprisoned in the country has exceeded sixty. The friends have no refuge save their trust in Bahá'u'lláh. We must steadfastly continue to cling to the Hem of His Garment, fervently pray for the alleviation of the sufferings of our oppressed brethren, resolutely arise to win victories in His name, and be confident that the promised deliverance of the Faith of God from the shackles of blind orthodoxy will, in the fullness of time, be fully realized with the aid of His invisible hosts and as decreed by His invincible Will.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

#### The Bahá'ís: An Accursed Community

The Iranian press is still silent concerning the arrest, on 21st August last, of the nine members of the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í community, "the National Spiritual Assembly" (*Le Monde* of 28th

August). No one knows who proceeded to arrest them, except that it was a group of armed men “claiming authority,” who took refuge in pregnant silence. Nothing is known, either, of the place of their confinement. Neither President Bani-Sadr, nor the Attorney-General, Ayatollah Ghodoussi, could, or would, reply to the anguished appeals of the families and co-religionists of the nine persons.

Accused of “plotting against the security of the State,” they are in danger of execution. In accordance with the procedure of the “Islamic revolutionary tribunals,” the arraignment and the trial will take place in camera without the presence of an advocate; the verdict could be pronounced and executed before even the Attorney General is informed.

Thousands of “counterrevolutionaries” are no doubt in the same situation. But the situation of the Bahá’ís is, in general, far more grave inasmuch as the repression falls not only on individuals who could have been guilty of subversive activities, but on an entire group of people who lack the benefit of any legal protection. In the eyes of the Constitution, indeed, the Bahá’ís ... do not exist. Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, although far less numerous than the followers of this humanist religion, are mentioned in the fundamental law and benefit from all the rights accorded to other citizens of Muslim faith, including that of being represented in Parliament. Thus some three hundred thousand Bahá’ís have been reduced to the condition of pariahs.

The anarchy produced by the revolution—which was in principle directed against imperial autocracy and foreign domination—has favored the unleashing of the fanaticism, not of the population, but of ultraconservative religious organizations like the brotherhood of the Tablighat-i-Islamí (an Islamic propaganda group), who already under the monarchy were conducting persecutions with the active collaboration of SAVAK. Since the installation of the Republic a score of Bahá’í Holy Places have been destroyed or confiscated by the local authorities; centers of worship in eighty towns and villages have been destroyed or burned down; some forty cemeteries have been profaned and in most cases confiscated; museums, shops, or places of business belonging to Bahá’ís have been attacked or looted in more than three hundred and eighty urban or rural settlements, according to a report compiled two months ago by the National Spiritual Assembly of the community.

The high authorities of the Republic would find it difficult to exonerate themselves from all responsibility for these collective crimes. Not one of them, as far as is known, has explicitly condemned them. Worse, the Revolutionary Council, on which, moreover, some “liberals” are represented, decreed last winter (see the daily *Etelaat* of 20th December) that the army must expel from its ranks all persons who do not belong to one of the four “official” religions of the State (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian). Following this, in addition to the officers and soldiers, civil servants, employees of nationalized industries, university professors and teachers have been dismissed from one day to the next without any indemnity or pension. Again by order of the government, Bahá’í places of worship in several cities, notably in Tehran and Mashhad, have been converted into “free Islamic Universities.”

The Bahá’ís are denounced as “heretics,” as “renegades” from Islam, because the Founders of their religion, in the last century, were for the most part, Persian Muslims, because their Prophet, the Báb (1819—1850) had the misfortune to be born after Muḥammad, who is considered to be the last Messenger of God.

However, the millions of Bahá'ís scattered today in some eighty-eight thousand localities across the five continents are neither of Persian origin nor are they Muslim converts. Beyond this, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes and respects Islam.

However, the persecutors have “refined” their accusations by “politicizing” them. The Bahá'ís, according to them, are “agents of Israel” because the World Center of the community is situated in Haifa. But the seat was established in that city in 1868, almost a century before the foundation of the Jewish State.

The Bahá'ís, it is said again, were “supporters of the regime and of SAVAK!” Yet they refused—in face of demands of the Shah—to join the single Rastakhiz party, in spite of the pogroms organized against them by SAVAK, notably in 1955 and in 1963. In the last months of the monarchy the agents of the secret police had caused some three hundred houses belonging to Bahá'ís to be burnt. In accordance with their teachings, the Bahá'ís are required to be obedient to the established authority, whatever it may be, and refuse—under pain of being expelled from the community—to involve themselves in any activity or to accept any office of a political nature. This shows how absurd appears the accusation of “plotting against the security of the State” formulated against the nine elected members of the supreme body of the community in Iran.

They knew that they were in danger. They could, like so many others, have chosen exile. As one of them said to us recently, they had nevertheless decided “to remain at the side of our fellow believers in distress.” Their fidelity can cost them their lives. But who, in Iran or abroad, will have the courage or the wish to intervene in favor of a community accursed among all others?

—Eric Rouleau

23 September 1980

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

MEMBERS VENERABLE COMMUNITY OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S FOLLOWERS IN HIS NATIVE LAND ARE FACING IN UTMOST NOBILITY HEROISM AND IN TRADITION THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS FOREBEARS ORDEALS SEVERITY OF WHICH IS REMINISCENT OF FEROCITY PERSECUTIONS HEROIC AGE OUR FAITH. INNOCENT BLOOD THEY ARE SHEDDING ALTAR SACRIFICE, INTENSE SUFFERINGS THEY ARE SERENELY BEARING IN LOVE HIS PATH ARE RELEASING SPIRITUAL ENERGIES WHICH ARE ACCELERATING MOMENTUM PROGRESS FAITH OPENING UP NEW HORIZONS AS IT IRRESISTIBLY FORGES AHEAD TOWARDS ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY.

UNITED NATIONS SUBCOMMISSION ON PREVENTION DISCRIMINATION PROTECTION MINORITIES MEETING IN GENEVA FOLLOWING PRESENTATION MADE BY REPRESENTATIVE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSED APPROVED ON 10 SEPTEMBER RESOLUTION EXPRESSING PROFOUND CONCERN OVER SAFETY BAHÁ'ÍS IRAN AND REQUESTING UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL CONVEY THIS CONCERN TO AUTHORITIES IRAN AND CALL ON THEM PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEETING IN STRASBOURG AND COMPRISING OVER 400 MEMBERS UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED ON SEPTEMBER 19 HISTORIC RESOLUTION WHICH DENOUNCES SYSTEMATIC CAMPAIGN PERSECUTION IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS AND VIOLATION THEIR ELEMENTARY HUMAN RIGHTS, CALLS UPON GOVERNMENT IRAN GRANT BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY LEGAL RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION, AND UPON FOREIGN MINISTERS EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES MAKE URGENT PRESENTATIONS TO IRANIAN AUTHORITIES CEASE PERSECUTION BAHÁ'ÍS ALLOWING THEM PRACTICE THEIR RELIGION FREELY AND ENJOY FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND REQUESTS MEMBER STATES IMPOSE EMBARGO ON ALL SALES OF SUBSIDIZED SURPLUS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS TO IRAN UNTIL FULL HUMAN RIGHTS ARE RESTORED TO IRANIAN CITIZENS. THIS REMARKABLE DOCUMENT ENDS WITH STATEMENT THAT EVIDENCE SUGGESTS ARRESTS EXECUTIONS OF BAHÁ'ÍS ARE CONTINUING AND INCREASING ACCORDING TO PREARRANGED PLAN AND ONLY SPEEDY RESPONSE BY EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CAN STOP THESE DEVELOPMENTS.

REPORTS RECEIVED FROM ALL CONTINENTS ELOQUENTLY BEAR TESTIMONY TO SENSE OF UNITY FELT BY FRIENDS EVERYWHERE IN FACE DEPRIVATIONS THEIR PERSIAN BRETHREN, GENEROUS OFFERINGS OF TIME, EFFORT, AND RESOURCES IN MEMORY MARTYRS AND ON BEHALF OF IMPRISONED FRIENDS, AMONG WHOM ARE A COUNSELOR, AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS, ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AS WELL AS MEMBERS SEVERAL LOCAL ASSEMBLIES. THESE AFFLICTIONS HAVE ENABLED FRIENDS IN MOST COUNTRIES WORLD OVER PROCLAIM FAITH TO HIGHEST OFFICIALS THEIR

COUNTRY AND NOISE ABROAD ITS TEACHINGS THROUGH MASS MEDIA. COUNTLESS PLEDGES OF LOYALTY AND OF RENEWED DEDICATION HAVE BEEN MADE TO SHOW IN THE DAYS AHEAD GREATER SOLIDARITY AUDACITY ACHIEVE MORE STIRRING VICTORIES FOR GOD'S HOLY FAITH. ALREADY DURING PAST SEVERAL WEEKS IN ONE COUNTRY LATIN AMERICA NUMBER BELIEVERS HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED RESULT EFFORTS INSPIRED BLOOD INNOCENT MARTYRS. LET MEN OF VALOR IN OTHER COUNTRIES FOLLOW IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS.

CALL ON FRIENDS EVERYWHERE JOIN US IN PRAYERS THANKSGIVING FOR THESE VICTORIES WORTHY RESPONSES OF BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY TO BITTER PERSECUTIONS BEING METED OUT ITS FOLLOWERS IN NATIVE LAND BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. URGE ALL FRIENDS CONTINUE THEIR SUPPLICATIONS TO HIM THAT UNYIELDING INTRANSIGENT ATTITUDE OF IRANIAN AUTHORITIES TOWARD BAHÁ'ÍS MAY BE TRANSMUTED INTO CONFIDENCE IN AND GOODWILL TOWARDS PEACE-LOVING, LAW-ABIDING MEMBERS PRESENTLY PROSCRIBED COMMUNITY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE



24 September 1980

To the Bahá'ís of the World

WITH HEARTS BRIMMING WITH GRATITUDE FOR BOUNTIFUL CONFIRMATIONS BLESSED BEAUTY  
ANNOUNCE FOLLOWING RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS HOLY LAND:

IN BAHJÍ JUST ACQUIRED STRIP OF LAND 13,150 SQUARE METERS IN AREA BORDERING DRIVEWAY  
FROM WESTERN GATE BAHÁ'Í PROPERTY. AREA ACQUIRED ADJACENT TO AND SOUTH OF PRESENT  
BOUNDARY OLIVE GROVE ENABLES SOUTHWEST QUADRANT GARDENS SURROUNDING MOST HOLY  
SHRINE BE COMPLETED. THIS ACQUISITION WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY EXCHANGE AGAINST PROPERTY  
ON MAIN ROAD TO NAZARETH DONATED WORLD CENTER BY DESCENDANTS LATE HUSAYN BÁQIR  
KÁSHÁNÍ.

ALSO PURCHASED NEARLY 50,000 SQUARE METERS AGRICULTURAL LAND ADJACENT TO AND NORTH OF  
MAZRA'IH PROPERTY AS PROTECTION TO MANSION IN RAPIDLY DEVELOPING AREA.

SHIPMENT OVER 1,000 PIECES COMPRISING 120 CUBIC METERS KATRINA CEDAR WOOD FROM TURKEY  
JUST CLEARED FROM HAIFA PORT FOR USE RESTORATION HOUSE 'ABDU'LLÁH PÁSHÁ IN 'AKKÁ.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

3 November 1980

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

One of the greatest sources of consolation for The Universal House of Justice amid the tribulations of the past twelve years, has been the establishment and growth of the Continental Boards of Counselors, and the assistance that this institution has been rendering, in ever-increasing measure, to the sound development of the worldwide Bahá'í community. We cannot pay too high a tribute to the indefatigable labors of the devoted souls who have been called upon to shoulder this onerous responsibility, and who have followed with such fidelity the path of self-sacrificing service that has been blazed for them by the beloved Hands of the Cause of God.

In June 1979 we were moved to announce that the duration of the terms of office of Continental Counselors would be five years, to start on the Day of the Covenant of this year. As this date approaches, we have decided that the time is ripe for a further step in the development of the institution itself that will, at one and the same time, accord greater discretion and freedom of action to the Continental Boards of Counselors in the carrying out of their duties, and widen the scope of each Board to embrace an entire continent. In accordance with this decision, the zones of the Continental Boards of Counsellors will, from the Day of the Covenant of the year 137 (26 November 1980), be as follows:

Africa, comprising the areas of the four present zones of that continent.

The Americas, comprising the present zones of North, Central and South America.

Asia, comprising the present zones of Western, South Central and Southeastern Asia, together with the present zone of Northeastern Asia without the Hawaiian Islands and Micronesia.

Australasia, comprising the present zone of Australasia plus the Hawaiian Islands and Micronesia.

Europe.

Those who are now appointed as Counselors to serve on these Continental Boards for the next five years are:

**Africa:** Dr. Hushang Ahdieh (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Ḥusayn Ardekání, Mr. Friday Ekpe, Mr. Oloro Epyeru, Mr. Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, Mr. Zekrullah Kazemi, Mr. Muḥammad Kebdani, Mrs. Thelma Khelghati, Mr. William Masehla, Mr. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá, Mr. Kolonario Oule, Mrs. Isobel Sabri, Dr. Mihdí Samandarí, Mr. Peter Vuyiya, Mrs. Bahíyyih Winckler.

**The Americas:** Dr. Hidáyatu'lláh Aḥmadíyyih, Dr. Farzam Arbáb, Mrs. Carmen de Burafato, Mr. Athos Costas, Mr. Angus Cowan, Mr. Lloyd Gardner (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí, Mrs. Laretta King, Mr. Artemus Lamb, Mr. Peter McLaren, Mr. Raúl Pavón, Dr. Sarah Pereira, Mrs. Ruth Pringle, Mr. Fred Schechter, Mrs. Velma Sherrill, Mr. Donald Witzel.

**Asia:** Mr. Burhání'd-Dín Afshín, Mrs. Shirin Boman, Dr. Masf̄h Farhangí, Dr. John Fozdar, Mr. Zabíhu'lláh Gulmuḥammadí, Mr. Aydin Güney, Mr. Dipchand Khianra, Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Mumtází, Mr. S. Nagaratnam, Mr. Khudáraḥm Paymán (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Manúchihr Salmánpúr, Mr. Vicente Samaniego, Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, Dr. Chellie Sundram, Mr. Hideya Suzuki, Mr. Yan Kee Leong.

**Australasia:** Mr. Suhayl 'Alá'í, Mr. Ben Ayala, Mr. Owen Battrick (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Richard Benson, Mrs. Tinai Hancock, Dr. Peter Khan, Mr. Lisiate Maka.

**Europe:** Mr. Erik Blumenthal, Mrs. Dorothy Ferraby, Dr. Agnes Ghaznavi, Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Mr. Louis Hénuzet (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mrs. Ursula Mühlischlegel, Dr. Leo Niederreiter, Mrs. Betty Reed, Mr. Adib Taherzadeh.

A number of friends who have rendered highly valued services as Counselors are not being reappointed for the coming term, and we wish to express here our profound gratitude for the devoted labors they have rendered and are rendering in the path of the Cause. These dearly loved believers are:

Mr. Seewoosumbur-Jeehoba Appa, Dr. Iraj Ayman, Mr. Rowland Estall, Mr. Howard Harwood, Miss Violet Hoehnke, Mrs. Salisa Kermani, Mr. Paul Lucas, Miss Elena Marsella, Mr. Alfred Osborne, Miss Thelma Perks, Mr. Hádí Raḥmání, Mr. 'Imád Sábírán, Miss Edna True.

Henceforth the Board of Counselors in each continent will have wider discretion to decide such matters as whether to divide its area into zones, and what the boundaries of such zones should be, the number and location of the Board's offices, and the manner in which the members of the Auxiliary Boards will report to and operate under the Counselors. The principles and policies governing the operation of the Continental Boards of Counselors, however, and their relationships with the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and the individual believers will remain unchanged. As the Bahá'í world experiences the manifold interactions of these two vital and complementary arms of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the unique benefits of this divinely ordained System become ever more apparent. The harmonious interaction and the proper discharge of the duties of these institutions representing the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá is the essential basis at this time for the protection of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and the fulfillment of its God-given mandate.

Events of the most profound significance are taking place in the world. The river of human history is flowing at a bewildering speed. Age-old institutions are collapsing. Traditional ways are being forgotten, and newly born ideologies which were fondly expected to take their place, are withering and decaying before the eyes of their disillusioned adherents. Amidst this decay and disruption, assailed from every side by the turmoil of the age, the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, unshakably founded on the Word of God, protected by

the shield of the Covenant and assisted by the hosts of the Concourse on High, is rising in every part of the world.

Every institution of this divinely created Order is one more refuge for a distraught populace; every soul illumined by the light of the sacred Message is one more link in the oneness of mankind, one more servant ministering to the needs of an ailing world. Even should the Bahá'í communities, in the years immediately ahead, be cut off from the World Center or from one another—as some already have been—the Bahá'ís will neither halt nor hesitate; they will continue to pursue their objectives, guided by their Spiritual Assemblies and led by the Counselors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants. It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the new and challenging development now taking place in the evolution of the institution of the Counselors will release great energies for the advancement of the Cause of God in every land.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

22 December 1980

To gatherings of Counselors in all countries

HAIL CONVOCAION IN ALL CONTINENTS FIVE GATHERINGS CONTINENTAL BOARDS COUNSELORS ON MORROW THEIR APPOINTMENT FOR NEW TERM. GRATEFUL DIVINE BLESSINGS ENABLING THESE GATHERINGS BE GRACED BY PRESENCE HANDS CAUSE GOD WHO IN ACCORDANCE 'ABDU'L-BAHA'S WILL TESTAMENT WERE APPOINTED BY BELOVED GUARDIAN AND DESCRIBED BY HIM AS CHIEF STEWARDS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S EMBRYONIC WORLD COMMONWEALTH.

INVESTED WITH DUAL FUNCTION DISTINGUISHING MEMBERS THAT AUGUST INSTITUTION AND FOLLOWING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS EACH NEWLY APPOINTED BOARD COUNSELORS IS CALLED UPON AMIDST TURMOIL PRESENT HOUR ASSUME WITH RENEWED VIGOR AND DETERMINATION UNDER GUIDANCE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER ITS VITAL DUTIES GUARD OVER SECURITY ENSURE PROPAGATION GOD'S FAITH IN CONSULTATION NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES WITHIN CONFINES ITS CONTINENT IN STRICT CONFORMITY PRINCIPLES OUTLINED BY GUARDIAN IN HIS CABLE TO BAHÁ'Í WORLD DATED 4 JUNE 1957. AS HE CLEARLY ENVISAGED THEN AND AS IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY APPARENT NOW SECURITY CAUSE PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL HEALTH COMMUNITY VITALITY FAITH INDIVIDUALS PROPER FUNCTIONING BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS FRUITION WORLDWIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILLMENT ULTIMATE DESTINY FAITH ALL DEPENDENT UPON BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITIES MEMBERS TWIN ARMS ADMINISTRATION.

IF AT ANY TIME FOR ANY REASON COMMUNICATION WITH WORLD CENTER IS CUT OFF IN FUTURE, COUNSELORS EACH CONTINENT SHOULD COLLECTIVELY INDIVIDUALLY ASSIST NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES ENSURE CONTINUATION NORMAL ADMINISTRATION FAITH BY THESE ASSEMBLIES WITHOUT INTERRUPTION UNTIL COMMUNICATIONS CAN BE RESTORED. FURTHERMORE IF IT SHOULD PROVE UNFEASIBLE AT END OF ANY FIVE YEAR TERM OF OFFICE FOR HOUSE JUSTICE TO REVIEW AND RENEW MEMBERSHIP CONTINENTAL BOARDS COUNSELORS, THESE BOARDS SHOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE EVEN IF ONE OR MORE THEIR MEMBERS IS UNABLE FUNCTION, FAITHFULLY DISCHARGING THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, UNTIL PROPITIOUS CONDITIONS PREVAIL FOR HOUSE JUSTICE CONSIDER APPOINTMENT SUCCESSORS. FERVENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES GOD'S PRECIOUS FAITH MAY BE PROTECTED FROM ONSLAUGHT ITS ENEMIES WITHIN ITS ANTAGONISTS BOTH RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR WITHOUT, THAT MEMBERS RECONSTITUTED INSTITUTION COUNSELORS MAY BE RECIPIENTS FRESH MEASURE HEAVENLY CONFIRMATIONS AND THAT FIRST MEETINGS NOW CONVENED MAY LAY FIRM FOUNDATIONS FOR EFFICIENT OPERATION THIS ESSENTIAL ORGAN STEADILY UNFOLDING ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. REQUEST COUNSELORS SHARE COPY THIS MESSAGE WITH ALL NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES THEIR CONTINENT.



Department of the Secretariat

28 December 1980

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 16 October 1980 enclosing a letter from the Spiritual Assembly of ... posing questions which have arisen as a result of reading the book *When We Grow Up* by Bahíyyih Nakhjavání, and it has instructed us to convey the following.

The House of Justice suggests that all statements in the Holy Writings concerning specific areas of the relationship between men and women should be considered in the light of the general principle of equality between the sexes that has been authoritatively and repeatedly enunciated in the Sacred Texts. In one of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts: "In this divine age the bounties of God have encompassed the world of women. Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced. Distinctions have been utterly removed." That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being "negligible."

The relationship between husband and wife must be viewed in the context of the Bahá'í ideal of family life. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, one must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it, and one of the keys to the strengthening of unity is loving consultation. The atmosphere within a Bahá'í family as within the community as a whole should express "the keynote of the Cause of God" which, the beloved Guardian has stated, "is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation."

A family, however, is a very special kind of "community." The Research Department has not come across any statements which specifically name the father as responsible for the "security, progress and unity of the family" as is stated in Bahíyyih Nakhjavání's book, but it can be inferred from a number of the responsibilities placed upon him, that the father can be regarded as the "head" of the family. The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children; the mother—not the father—bears the

children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons and, as the Guardian's secretary has written on his behalf, "The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í Writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development ..." A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband—a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife. This principle of the husband's responsibility to provide for and protect the family can be seen applied also in the law of intestacy which provides that the family's dwelling place passes, on the father's death, not to his widow, but to his eldest son; the son at the same time has the responsibility to care for his mother.

It is in this context of mutual and complementary duties, and responsibilities that one should read the Tablet in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the following exhortation:

O Handmaids of the All-Sufficing God!

Exert yourselves, that haply ye may be enabled to acquire such virtues as shall honor and distinguish you amongst all women. Of a surety, there is no greater pride and glory for a woman than to be a handmaid in God's Court of Grandeur; and the qualities that shall merit her this station are an alert and wakeful heart; a firm conviction of the unity of God, the Peerless; a heartfelt love for all His maidservants; spotless purity and chastity; obedience to and consideration for her husband; attention to the education and nurturing of her children; composure, calmness, dignity and self-possession; diligence in praising God, and worshiping Him both night and day; constancy and firmness in His holy Covenant; and the utmost ardor, enthusiasm, and attachment to His Cause....

This exhortation to the utmost degree of spirituality and self-abnegation should not be read as a legal definition giving the husband absolute authority over his wife, for, in a letter written to an individual believer on 22 July 1943, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

The Guardian, in his remarks ... about parents' and children's, wives' and husbands' relations in America, meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them. Also wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands, which, of course, is not right, any more than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife.

In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which is often read at



Bahá'í weddings: "Verily, they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time."

These are all relationships within the family, but there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavor, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world....

and again:

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; ...

*(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 135)*

In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has envisaged that women as well as men would be breadwinners in stating:

Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 90)*

A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Bahá'u'lláh's provision that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools.

It is hoped that the above explanations and comments will help the Local Spiritual Assembly of ... to resolve the questions set forth in its letter.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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 somber 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 attention 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 vigor. Added to the burning desire of the friends everywhere to show their love for their brethren in Persia by teaching the Cause with redoubled fervor, 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 Counselors 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 Counselors, 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 Riḍván 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 fiftieth 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 Counselors, 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 midpoint 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 Ḥaẓíratu'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 lifeblood 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

16 April 1981

To all Continental Pioneer Committees

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As we enter the second phase of the Seven Year Plan, The Universal House of Justice has given consideration to the vital role that Continental Pioneer Committees can and should increasingly play in helping to fulfill the pioneer goals that have been set, and in coordinating international traveling teaching projects. We have been asked to send you the following comments.

There is no doubt that closer collaboration of the Continental Pioneer Committees with the Continental Boards of Counselors and with the National Spiritual Assemblies, both those supplying pioneers and travel teachers and those receiving them, will increase the number of pioneers effectively and expeditiously settled at their posts, and will improve the results of the labors of international traveling teachers. This collaboration should always be uppermost in the minds of each Continental Pioneer Committee, particularly its secretary, so that efforts are increasingly made to widen the scope of the relationships and to strengthen the ties which bind the Continental Pioneer Committees to the institutions which they are called upon to serve.

**Pioneers**

In the message of The Universal House of Justice to The Bahá'ís of the World, intended to be read at the National Conventions, a call is raised for a total of 279 pioneers to settle in 80 countries. A list of these countries is attached, showing the number to be settled in each. The number of pioneers on this list is additional to those called for at the outset of the Plan. No assignment of specific quotas has been made to National Spiritual Assemblies, although it is generally expected that the National Spiritual Assemblies originally made responsible for sending pioneers to these countries will respond favorably to this new call and spontaneously feel the spiritual responsibility to fill the supplementary pioneer needs. It will be the duty of Pioneer Committees to keep a close tally of pioneers settling in the countries named by the House of Justice, and to ensure, to the extent possible, that no goals remain unfilled.

**Traveling Teachers**

Experience has shown that traveling teachers from abroad can be of tremendous assistance to the teaching work in the fields of proclamation, expansion, and consolidation. It is important that the best use possible be made of these friends who are sacrificing their time and resources to serve the Faith in foreign fields.

Care must also be taken that traveling teachers do not prove to be a burden on the receiving community, and a cause of problems. The two most frequently occurring problems caused by traveling teachers can, the House of Justice feels, be greatly reduced by prior advice and information provided by your Committees.

The first is the arrival in a country, in rapid succession, of foreign traveling teachers who do not speak the language. Sometimes the net result is that the time of all the best local teachers (who may well be better teachers than the visitor) is occupied by translating for the traveler, and the community, instead of being helped and stimulated by visitors, is exhausted and becomes reluctant to accept future help. This can be avoided by proper advance planning and by explaining to both the Spiritual Assemblies and to the traveling teachers themselves, that the Assemblies should not feel obliged to provide assistance for a visitor who arrives without prior agreement, and that a teacher who arrives unannounced may well have to concentrate on doing his teaching work unaided and without burdening the local friends.

The second problem occurs most frequently in countries such as those in Africa, where there is entry by troops. In such countries it is comparatively easy to bring large numbers of new believers into the Faith, and this is such a thrilling experience that visiting teachers often tend to prefer to do this rather than help with the consolidation work. Yet it is in consolidation that traveling teachers from abroad can often be most useful to the community. The House of Justice believes that this problem can be eased by your Committees' impressing upon traveling teachers that they must adhere strictly to the guidance given to them by the teaching committees and Spiritual Assemblies on the spot, and subordinate their own wishes to the need to render their services in the fields where they are most urgently required. It should be pointed out that, especially if they are assigned to expansion work, they must remember that consolidation is an essential and inseparable element of teaching, and if they go to a remote area and enroll believers whom no one is going to be able to visit again in the near future, they may well be doing a disservice to those people and to the Faith. To give people this glorious Message and then leave them in the lurch, produces disappointment and disillusionment, so that, when it does become possible to carry out properly planned teaching in that area, the teachers may well find the people resistant to the Message. The first teacher who was careless of consolidation, instead of planting and nourishing the seeds of faith has, in fact, "inoculated" the people against the Divine Message and made subsequent teaching very much harder.

While the caveats given above should be carefully considered by the Continental Pioneer Committees, nothing should be done to dampen the zeal of the friends to arise in order to carry out the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh to move from place to place. Their desire to offer themselves as travel teachers should be encouraged by the Continental Pioneer Committees to the extent that this lies within their power, and when the friends have volunteered, they should be lovingly guided so that the maximum results are obtained from their visits.

## **International Conferences 1982**

The Universal House of Justice has called International Conferences during the first nine months in 1982 in the following locations: Montreal, Canada; Quito, Ecuador; Dublin, Ireland; Lagos, Nigeria; and Manila, Philippines. As soon as specific dates have been set, you will be notified. It is anticipated that many friends attending these Conferences will be able to undertake travel teaching assignments in connection with their travel to and from Conferences.

The House of Justice has asked us to alert you to the opportunities, and to request you to devise ways and means of encouraging such offers and of taking advantage of them, preferably by advance planning and routing of volunteers in consultation with the National Spiritual Assemblies of the countries they will visit. You should plan to have a representative of your Committee at the Conference nearest you to assist in the processing of pioneer offers and also in the routing of late traveling teacher offers. If it is not possible for a member of your Committee to attend, you may delegate another believer to represent you who, in such case, must be thoroughly briefed by you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



Department of the Secretariat

17 April 1981

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The message of The Universal House of Justice to The Bahá'ís of the World, dated March 1981, must have reached you by now, and, likewise, the specific message addressed to the Bahá'ís under your jurisdiction, outlining the goals of the second phase of the Seven Year Plan. The Universal House of Justice feels it is important that we share with you now, on its behalf, the following comments on certain aspects of the Plan. Each National Spiritual Assembly should be able to determine what portion of these comments is applicable to its work in the light of the goals it has been assigned.

**The Local Spiritual Assembly**

As you note from statements of guidelines and goals, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the activities of local communities. It is obvious that through the consolidation of the foundations of the Administrative Order on the local level, the national institutions of the Faith will receive support and strength in the conduct of their activities. In turn, the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies should not only oversee the activities of the local communities, but it has the duty and privilege to coordinate the efforts and to stimulate and give direction to the spirit of enterprise and initiative of the individual friends. When a proper and balanced relationship is maintained between these two levels of Bahá'í activity, and a healthy interaction takes place between them, a foundation is laid for the community to become “spiritually welded into a unit at once dynamic and coherent.”

The broad outlines of duties and functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies are set forth clearly in the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and these instructions have already been sent to National Assemblies in the form of compilations. Similar statements have also been made by The Universal House of Justice, and these, too, have been shared with the friends. If any National Assembly does not have these compilations at hand, it should write to the World Center at once so that copies may be sent.

**Consolidation**

Consolidation is as vital a part of the teaching work as expansion. It is that aspect of teaching which assists the believers to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Teachings, and fans the flame of their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause, so that they will, of their own volition, continue the process of their

spiritual development, promote the teaching work, and strengthen the functioning of their administrative institutions. Proper consolidation is essential to the preservation of the spiritual health of the community, to the protection of its interests, to the upholding of its good name, and ultimately to the continuation of the work of expansion itself.

If a National Spiritual Assembly finds that its National Teaching Committee cannot devote sufficient attention to the work of consolidation, it should not hesitate to appoint, in addition, special committees whose tasks would be the conduct of the various activities which are essential for consolidation. Activities falling within this category include the organization of circuits of traveling teachers skilled in consolidation work; the holding of summer and winter schools, weekend institutes and conferences; the initiation and operation of tutorial schools; the dissemination of Bahá'í literature and the encouragement of its study by the friends; and the organization of special courses and institutes for Local Spiritual Assembly members.

In the courses for Local Assembly members special attention should be paid to the significance of the Assembly and the importance of attending its meetings; the functions and duties of the Assembly's officers, especially those of the secretary, upon the proper discharge of whose responsibilities the efficient functioning of the Assembly largely depends; the importance of making the Word of God easily accessible to the friends and of holding regular deepening classes where the Teachings can be studied and discussed; the vital necessity of prayer, and the value of holding gatherings for dawn prayers where and when feasible; the proper holding of Nineteen Day Feasts and the observance of Bahá'í Holy Days and anniversaries; the need to pay particular attention to the education of children; and the value of organizing social gatherings, such as picnics, encouraging the friends to associate together and with their non-Bahá'í friends in love and fragrance.

Consolidation activities promote the individual spiritual development of the friends, help to unite and strengthen Bahá'í community life, establish new social patterns for the friends, and stimulate the teaching work.

### **Bahá'í Literature**

The question of making the Sacred Texts available to the friends is so important that the House of Justice commissioned a special committee a year or so ago to prepare three compilations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. These compilations have already been sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies for publication in vernacular languages.

Recently, the House of Justice instructed that a compilation in the form of a small booklet be prepared for use by the friends, especially in areas where literature is not easily available in print. A copy of this compilation, which consists of basic prayers and passages from the Writings, will soon be sent to you. It would be highly desirable for every believer to have easy access to at least a compilation of this type in a language he can understand, and it is sincerely hoped that by the reading of the Sacred Texts and the exposure of the believer's soul to their influence, his spiritual growth will be stimulated. He will thereby not only increase his own spiritual joy and understanding, but also contribute to the consolidation of the entire community.

## **The Bahá'í Family**

Another aspect of Bahá'í life emphasized in the provisions of the Seven Year Plan is the development of the Bahá'í family life. If the believer is the only one of his family who has embraced the Faith, it is his duty to endeavor to lead as many other family members as possible to the light of divine guidance. As soon as a Bahá'í family unit emerges, the members should feel responsible for making the collective life of the family a spiritual reality, animated by divine love and inspired by the ennobling principles of the Faith. To achieve this purpose, the reading of the Sacred Writings and prayers should ideally become a daily family activity. As far as the teaching work is concerned, just as individuals are called upon to adopt teaching goals, the family itself could adopt its own goals. In this way the friends could make of their families strong healthy units, bright candles for the diffusion of the light of the Kingdom, and powerful centers to attract the heavenly confirmations.

## **Recognition of the Faith**

In the goals assigned To National Spiritual Assemblies, no specific reference has been made to goals for the recognition of the Bahá'í marriage certificate and of Bahá'í Holy Days, for the incorporation of Local Spiritual Assemblies, or for the obtaining of exemptions from state and municipal taxes on Bahá'í properties. Conditions in every country differ, and it is the duty of every National Spiritual Assembly to consider carefully the means whereby it can continually increase the degree of recognition officially accorded to Bahá'í institutions. It is important that any accomplishments in this vital area be reported to the World Center when National Spiritual Assemblies submit their semi-annual statistical reports.

The process of obtaining added recognition for the Faith can be stimulated if National Assemblies give adequate attention in their work to the ever-present need to continually foster cordial relations with government officials. Many of these officials have but a scanty and sometimes faulty knowledge of the Faith, and there is no doubt that when they become familiar with our aims and tenets and are assured of their beneficent effect on their society, they will be well-disposed to accord the Faith and its institutions at least such rights and privileges as are given to other religious organizations in the country.

## **Mass Media**

The importance of mass media to Bahá'í proclamation has risen sharply in past years, and acutely so since the crisis in Iran. Mass media, and particularly radio, have proven to be potent instruments for the deepening of the friends and the promotion of the teaching work in mass teaching areas. Thus in the second phase of the Plan, 92 National Spiritual Assemblies have been given goals calling for increased use of the mass media. Countries not included in the list are those where the use of mass media for Bahá'í purposes is not permitted, or where the friends are already so actively engaged in such projects that they did not need the inclusion of such a goal in their assignments.

It is important for National Spiritual Assemblies generally to be aware that the use of mass media is becoming international in scope and that there is a need for National Spiritual Assemblies to share

materials, methods, and experiences, and even personnel, in order to achieve best results.

In order to facilitate this exchange of information about the promotion of the Bahá'í work through radio and television, as well as about the availability of audiovisual materials, The Universal House of Justice, as it has been announced already, has established the International Bahá'í Audio-Visual Center (IBAVC) now in Toronto, Canada. This Center can be called upon by National Spiritual Assemblies for program materials and for advice on personnel training.

Every National Spiritual Assembly engaged in the teaching work in rural areas, where means of communication are scarce, is strongly advised to consider the possibility of applying for radio time on the local radio station, provided the cost is not too high. It may be possible to obtain such time in certain areas free of charge, especially when such a privilege is given to other groups or religions, or when the radio station is anxious to fill its time with worthwhile and helpful programs.

The House of Justice feels that in countries where the doors of publicity are open to the friends, every effort should be made to make the most of the attention being drawn to the Faith by the present situation, and exploit fully the potential for enlisting large numbers under the banner of the Cause.

### **Newsletters**

The dissemination of Bahá'í news, local, national, and international, should be pursued with added vigor. Bahá'í newsletters should be issued regularly to the friends, however great the sacrifice, for news of Bahá'í activities in other communities has always been a source of encouragement and has given the friends a sense of belonging to a vital, growing, and united worldwide Bahá'í family.

In some areas, it may be found that more than one newsletter is necessary in order to reach all the friends with news about the work of the Faith. According to reports received at the World Center, a number of National Assemblies, in addition to issuing a national news bulletin, have made provisions for their Teaching Committees to issue regional or district newsletters in languages understood by the friends. Indeed, many a Local Spiritual Assembly has its own newsletter to ensure that information about developments of the Cause can reach every believer.

### **Marriages, Births, Burials**

Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are embryonic Local Houses of Justice, should develop as rallying centers of the community. They must concern themselves not only with teaching the Faith, with the development of the Bahá'í way of life and with the proper organization of the Bahá'í activities of their communities, but also with those crucial events which profoundly affect the life of all human beings: birth, marriage, and death. When a Bahá'í couple has a child it is a matter of joy to the whole local community as well as to the couple, and each Local Spiritual Assembly should be encouraged to keep a register of such births, issuing a birth certificate to the parents. Such a practice will foster the consolidation of the community and of the Assembly itself. Even if only one of the parents is a Bahá'í, the Assembly could register the birth of the child, and upon application of the Bahá'í parent, issue the certificate.

The carrying out of the Bahá'í marriage laws, as given to the friends throughout the world, is a vital obligation of every believer who wishes to marry, and it is an important duty of every Local Spiritual Assembly to ensure that these laws are known to, and obeyed by, the believers within their jurisdiction, whether or not the Bahá'í marriage ceremony is recognized by civil law. Each Assembly, therefore, must conscientiously carry out its responsibilities in connection with the holding of Bahá'í marriage ceremonies, the recording of Bahá'í marriages in a register kept for this purpose, and the issuing of Bahá'í marriage certificates.

The burial of the dead is an occasion of great solemnity and importance, and while the conduct of the funeral service and the arrangements for the interment may be left to the relatives of the deceased, the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Bahá'í law of burial as at present applied, and in courteously and tactfully drawing these requirements to the attention of the relatives if there is any indication that they may fail to observe them. These requirements are: that the body not be cremated; that it not be transported more than an hour's journey from the place of death to the place of burial; that the Prayer for the Dead be recited if the deceased is a Bahá'í of fifteen years of age or more; and that the funeral be carried out in a simple and dignified manner that would be a credit to the community.

In some parts of the world, if Local Spiritual Assemblies fail to carry out these sacred duties, some believers might gradually drift away from the Faith and even pay dues to churches or other religious organizations to ensure that, when they require to register the birth of a child, to solemnize a marriage or to have a funeral service, there will be a religious institution ready to perform the necessary services. Conversely, when Local Assemblies have arisen to carry out these responsibilities, the believers have acquired a sense of security and solidarity, and have become confident that in such matters they can rely upon the agencies of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

### **Education of Children**

The House of Justice has noted with deep gratification the increased number of Local Spiritual Assemblies which are organizing Bahá'í classes for children. In order to make these classes effective, it is important to have a graduated system of lesson plans suited to different age groups. Usually, such material is prepared by each National Spiritual Assembly in the manner suited to its conditions. However, to assist National Assemblies in benefiting from the fruits of the labors of Bahá'ís in other countries, we have been asked to inform you that the National Spiritual Assemblies of Colombia, India, Malaysia, and the United States have reported the availability of literature prepared by them for this purpose. You should feel free to correspond with these National Spiritual Assemblies.

Regarding tutorial schools, some National Assemblies engaged in this activity have reported excellent results, which have helped both in the expansion work and in the consolidation of the Faith. A report on this type of activity has recently been received at the World Center, and a digest of the report is attached for the study of those National Assemblies who have been assigned this goal.

### **Pioneers**

Certain National Spiritual Assemblies have been assigned the goal of raising self-supporting homefront pioneers. This activity has great potential for the spread and consolidation of the Faith, and it is the hope of the House of Justice that this type of service will be encouraged in all national communities, including those which have not been given this goal.

In addition to homefront pioneers, there is a need for 279 pioneers to settle in 80 countries and islands of the world. A list of these pioneer needs is attached, and it is hoped that the required number of dedicated souls will arise to fill the posts that are in need of pioneer support. It is suggested that National Assemblies keep in close touch with the Continental Pioneer Committees, who will be in a position to keep National Assemblies informed of progress towards these goals.

### **Continental Pioneer Committees**

Continental Pioneer Committees working in close collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies are assuming greater importance as the work of the Faith unfolds on every continent. The House of Justice is writing to all Continental Pioneer Committees, outlining their added responsibilities in relation both to the newly formed Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies. It is the hope of the House of Justice that the services of these important Continental Committees will in the future be made available to the friends with ever-greater effectiveness.

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to assure you of its prayers for the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh to confirm your efforts as you face the next three years with optimism and confidence, and respond to the challenging opportunities ahead with determination and vigor.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **Bahá'í Tutorial Schools: An Example**

(Summarized from a report received concerning the functioning of such schools in a particular country)

#### **Special Conditions**

The Bahá'í tutorial schools in this country are called "Bahá'í Educational Centers" to prevent confusion with the schools supported by the State and managed by the Department of National Education. They were established in part in response to the goal assigned during the last Plan, to deepen at least one person in each Bahá'í locality to assist in consolidating the community and the Local Spiritual Assemblies. This need was felt particularly because in many of the villages, Bahá'í activities take place only during visits from pioneers or other visitors from the large cities.

#### **Definition**

"The Bahá'í Educational Center is a place where Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í children and adults receive, under the direction of their Local Spiritual Assemblies, first a spiritual education, then a basic literacy education, and finally a technical education such as training in crafts. This is also a center [for] numerous other social activities for youth and women. The purpose is to obtain quasi-universal participation of the whole village."

### **Relationship to Government**

The Centers "are allowed to function on the provincial level by the [Government] Department of Social Affairs, which was seeking every possible means to provide literacy education for the masses. The authorities of that Department are so happy with the development of these Educational Centers which cost them nothing that they gave permission to award certificates of participation in these courses, signed, on the one hand, by themselves and, on the other hand, by the Local Spiritual Assembly concerned, which acts as the principal. For their part, the chiefs of villages also stated that when a Local Spiritual Assembly wants an Educational Center, they will themselves erect huts in which classes may be held and encourage all the children to attend day classes and adults evening classes." The chiefs also witness the signing of the contract between the volunteer teachers (see below) and the Local Spiritual Assembly.

### **Teachers**

The teachers are Bahá'í volunteers, "often youth almost illiterate themselves who, after some time of unemployment in large cities, return disheartened to their native village but they become important when they are engaged in Educational Centers." These teachers sign an official contract with the Local Assembly before the chief of the civil community, who represents the tribe, stating that they are volunteers and will not demand any salary later on. "The teacher is recompensed by the Local Spiritual Assembly, which either provides labor to raise crops for him, provides him with food through pupils' contributions, or gives him financial assistance according to each particular case."

In addition, local villagers may offer to teach practical subjects in which they are knowledgeable (e.g., weaving of baskets or mats, canoe building, fishing, pottery, "cure by medicinal plants," etc.) (See below, "PROGRAM.")

### **Books and Materials**

A committee assists the Local Assemblies in the preparation of programs and teaching materials. Books and materials are now in preparation, and are being adapted to the "low instructional level of the teachers. This material will permit them to deepen themselves so that they may maintain a higher level than their pupils." Basic books for the teacher's use and such materials as chalk are bought by the Local Spiritual Assembly; materials for each pupil are bought by the parents at a wholesale price offered by the committee.

### **Registration and Fees**

Fees are set by each Local Spiritual Assembly. At the time of registration, which may take place at 3-month, 6-month or yearly intervals according to the decision of the Local Assembly, a registration card is issued to each pupil.

## **Program**

The program includes three parts: a “spiritual part which includes the teachings and laws, history of the Faith, and Bahá’í administration, all adapted to the level of each class;” a program which “includes basic literacy and general knowledge. This level will develop into post-literacy and permanent education in order to attain more advanced levels of evening classes, high school and even university.” The third part “is the apprenticeship in crafts or other trades useful in the development of the village. Any villager can offer to teach crafts or trades in which he is knowledgeable: for instance, weaving of baskets and mats ... fishing, cure by medicinal plants, pottery, embroidery, etc....”

The schedule of courses is determined by the Local Spiritual Assembly, which takes into account harvest and fishing seasons, Nineteen Day Feasts and Bahá’í Holy Days, national holidays, and the like.

The duration of the program is not yet determined, but the first literacy phase is expected to last approximately two years, to be followed by “post-literacy and permanent education, and even to university.”

## **Results to Date**

Effects already seen in various Local Assembly areas include the following:

1. The Assemblies are obliged to meet, and are thus strengthened.
2. Educational activities for children are established.
3. Youth activities, “such as playgrounds, choirs, lectures, homefront pioneers, team teaching and others,” are organized.
4. Women’s activities, “such as embroidery, sewing, hygiene, study of the importance of children’s education, etc.,” are organized.
5. “A more universal participation of the whole village in the spiritual activities, such as prayers, Nineteen Day Feast, contribution to the fund, teaching, etc.”
6. “Increase and expansion” in the number of believers.
7. “Great prestige in the eyes of the government for the Bahá’í education.”

## **Proposals for Future Developments**



1. Recording of prayers, Holy Writings, and songs on tapes, to be used as deepening material;
2. Recording on a local basis by the believers, with duplication of tapes for use by other Educational Centers;
3. Radio broadcasts addressed directly to Bahá'í Educational Centers, either through the establishment of a radio station or through rental of time on existing stations;
4. Creation of an audiovisual center able to adapt material to the needs of the development of the Educational Centers;
5. A regional bulletin dealing with the needs of the "post-literacy" students;
6. Publication of a book on the Messengers of God in the major languages of the country, intended for the Educational Center but which could then also be sold to "lay schools" for countrywide distribution;
7. Construction of durable buildings for the Educational Centers;
8. A mobile institute for the training of teachers.
- 9.

## 1. The Universal House of Justice

27 May 1981

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

PROFOUNDLY DISTRESSED OMINOUS NEWS IMMINENT OBLITERATION SITE BLESSED HOUSE BÁB BY AUTHORITIES SHIRAZ IN IMPLEMENTATION PLANS DRAWN UP SEVERAL MONTHS AND BUILD ROAD AND PUBLIC SQUARE. OCCUPANTS ADJACENT HOUSES MOST OF WHICH HAD BEEN ACQUIRED BY BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AS PROTECTION HOLY HOUSE NOW ORDERED VACATE HOUSES PRELIMINARY COMMENCEMENT PROJECT THIS WEEK. RECALL WHEN BÁB'S HOUSE WAS CONFISCATED GOVERNMENT ALLEGED STEP TAKEN AS PROTECTION HOLY PLACE, WHEN HOUSE DESTROYED GOVERNMENT STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED ACT TO UNRULY MOB, BUT THIS DEVELOPMENT NOW TOTALLY BELIES SUCH ALLEGATIONS SHOWS OFFICIAL DELIBERATE SYSTEMATIC DESIGN ERADICATION BAHÁ'Í HOLY PLACES AFTER THEIR CONFISCATION, IN ADDITION TO HARASSMENT PRESSURE ON INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS RECENT THEIR FAITH ON PAIN LOSING JOBS PENSIONS DEPRIVATION CIVIL RIGHTS IMPRISONMENT EXECUTION ASSASSINATION....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

22 July 1981

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 6 March 1981 and has instructed us to send you the following comments on the issues you have raised.

The House of Justice feels that your questions are very perceptive and that, in many instances, you have, yourself, provided the answers. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá so often points out, the Manifestation of God is a Divine Educator. He attracts the hearts of men, pours out His spirit upon those who respond to Him, instructs them in the right way of life, uses them to carry forward the development of human society, and disciplines them by His law. We Bahá'ís, we who have answered His call, bear the responsibility of carrying forward His work among mankind, and in spite of our innumerable failings His plan is irresistibly progressing. The great tragedy of mankind at this time is the failure of the vast majority of human beings to heed the Divine Call, and this is in large part occasioned by the failure of most of those who have believed to live up to the high standard that Bahá'u'lláh has set. This is the condition in which we must work in our service to mankind, turning a sin-covering eye to the faults of others, and striving in our own inmost selves to purify our lives in accordance with the divine Teachings.

The Day of God is a Day of Joy, but also a Day of Judgment. Every man is guided both by the Love of God and by the Fear of God. In their relationships with one another individual believers should be loving and forgiving, overlooking one another's faults for the sake of God, but the Spiritual Assemblies are the upholders of the law of God. They are embryonic Houses of Justice. The education of a child requires both love and discipline; so also does the education of believers and the education of a community. One of the failings of Bahá'ís, however, is to confuse these two roles, individuals behaving like little Spiritual Assemblies, and Spiritual Assemblies forgetting that they must exercise justice.

Great love and patience are needed towards new believers, especially those who have come from very troubled backgrounds, but ultimately they too have to learn the responsibilities they have taken upon themselves by accepting Bahá'u'lláh and must uphold the principles that Bahá'u'lláh has revealed. If they do not do so, how can the condition of mankind be improved? Some people accept the Faith, not as a response to the divine Summons to God's service, but as a way to find love and happiness and companionship and understanding for themselves. At the beginning this is only natural, for people are

soresly in need of such spiritual strengths, but if such people do not soon progress to the point where they are more concerned about what they can do for God and His Cause than what it can do for them, they will surely become disillusioned and drift away. Arousing in the hearts of the friends the enthusiasm and spirit of selfless service that will carry them over this transition is one of the most fundamental aspects of deepening and consolidation. Deepening is far more a matter of developing a spiritual attitude, devotion and selflessness than it is of acquiring information, although this, of course, is also important.

In a letter to an individual Bahá'í, dated 5 April 1956, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

He was very sorry to hear that you have had so many tests in your Bahá'í life. There is no doubt that many of them are due to our own nature. In other words, if we are very sensitive, or if we are in some way brought up in a different environment from the Bahá'ís amongst whom we live, we naturally see things differently and may feel them more acutely; and the other side of it is that the imperfections of our fellow-Bahá'ís can be a great trial to us.

We must always remember that in the cesspool of materialism, which is what modern civilization has to a certain extent become, Bahá'ís—that is some of them—are still to a certain extent affected by the society from which they have sprung. In other words, they have recognized the Manifestation of God, but they have not been believers long enough, or perhaps tried hard enough, to become “a new creation.”

All we can do in such cases is to do our duty; and the Guardian feels very strongly that your duty is towards Bahá'u'lláh and the Faith you love so dearly; and certainly is not to take the weaker course and sever yourself from the Bahá'í Community.

He feels that, if you close your eyes to the failings of others, and fix your love and prayers upon Bahá'u'lláh, you will have the strength to weather this storm, and will be much better for it in the end, spiritually. Although you suffer, you will gain a maturity that will enable you to be of greater help to both your fellow-Bahá'ís and your children.

The ideal of human life is described again and again and in multitudes of ways in the Writings. These aspects of the Teachings are discussed in Teaching Institutes and Summer Schools and elaborated in many books. Then, in general, it is left to the individual believer, as a responsibility between himself and God, to follow these Teachings. It is not the business either of the believers or of the Spiritual Assemblies to pry into the lives of individual friends to ascertain the degree to which they are living up to the standards of the Cause. Only if misbehavior becomes blatant and flagrant does it become a matter for action, and then it is a matter for action by the Assembly and not by individuals. Even then the Assembly must be loving and patient, and exhort the believer to follow the Path of the Cause, but, if he persists in openly and flagrantly flouting the Bahá'í law, the Assembly has no alternative to ultimately depriving him of his voting rights.

Applying these principles requires mature understanding and judgment, and great love for one's fellowmen. It is a weighty responsibility which rests upon the shoulders of the members of Spiritual Assemblies. Undoubtedly errors are made and will continue to be made, but the more the friends are

united and wholeheartedly support their Assemblies, the sooner will these mature in their decisions and actions, outgrow their mistakes, and become strong magnets for the Faith.

Briefly, then, one can say that the Bahá'ís, while in the process of improving their own lives, are engaged in attracting their fellowmen to the Love of God, educating them through the Teachings of God, introducing them to the vivifying discipline of the Law of God, and enlisting them as fellow-warriors in the Army of God. The difficulties that you describe are the result of the problem of properly balancing these many aspects of following the Bahá'í Cause and of training new believers from the point of acceptance of the Message to being champions of the Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

17 October 1981

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

SITUATION FRIENDS IRAN STEADILY DETERIORATING. ALTHOUGH REVOLUTIONARY COURT YAZD ORDERED RELEASE FOUR OF THOSE DETAINED PRESSURES IN DIFFERENT FORMS ARE MOUNTING IN YAZD AND IN OTHER PARTS COUNTRY. BAHÁ'Í WORKERS BEING INCREASINGLY EXPELLED FROM FACTORIES, BAHÁ'Í SHOPKEEPERS IN ONE PROVINCE ORDERED CLOSE DOWN FOLLOWING WITHDRAWAL BUSINESS LICENSES, SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SCRUTINIZING RELIGION STUDENTS PRIOR TO REGISTRATION RESULTING IN REFUSAL REGISTER BAHÁ'Í STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS. DECREE ANNOUNCED BY MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PUBLISHED IN KAYHÁN DAILY NUMBER 11397 DATED 9 MIHR 1360 (SEPTEMBER 30, 1981) LISTS CRIMES WHICH BAR PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS FROM BEING EMPLOYED OR REGISTERED AT UNIVERSITIES. AMONG CRIMES LISTED IS WHAT TEXT OF DECREE DESCRIBES AS MEMBERSHIP IN SECT WHICH IS RECOGNIZED BY MOSLEMS AS MISLED AND HERETICAL SECT. THIS IS OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO MEMBERSHIP IN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. BAHÁ'Í CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXEMPLIFYING HIGH SPIRIT HEROISM STEADFASTNESS PREFERRING DEPRIVATION FROM SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION TO RECONTATION FAITH....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

22 October 1981

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

A REPORT FROM TEHRAN SAYS IRAN'S CENTRAL REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE IS PLANNING A NEW CAMPAIGN TO ROUND UP MEMBERS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH. THE BAHÁ'ÍS REPORTEDLY WILL BE ARRESTED ON GROUNDS THAT THEIR MARRIAGES ARE ILLEGAL AND THEIR CHILDREN ILLEGITIMATE SINCE IRAN DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH. THE COMMITTEE SAYS SOME 96 BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE BEEN EXECUTED SO FAR AND ANOTHER 200 ARE UNDER ARREST. SOME 10,000 BAHÁ'Í FAMILIES ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE FLED IRAN SINCE THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THEM BEGAN. THE COMMITTEE HAS ANOTHER 20,000 BAHÁ'Í NAMES ON ITS ARREST LIST COMPILED FROM CAPTURED BAHÁ'Í OFFICE LISTS AND DOCUMENTS FROM THE SHAH'S OLD SECRET POLICE, SAVAK. MANY BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE CHANGED THEIR NAMES OR GONE INTO HIDING TO ESCAPE CAPTURE.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

28 December 1981

To National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH HEAVY HEARTS INFORM FRIENDS THROUGHOUT WORLD EIGHT MEMBERS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IRAN ARRESTED 13 DECEMBER WERE EXECUTED 27 DECEMBER. THEY ARE:

MR. KÁMRÁN ŞAMÍMÍ  
MRS. ZHÍNÚS MAḤMÚDÍ  
MR. MAḤMÚD MAJDHÚB  
MR. JALÁL 'AZÍZÍ  
MR. MIHDÍ AMÍN AMÍN  
MR. SÍRÚS RAWŞHANÍ  
MR. 'IZZATU'LLÁH FURÚHÍ  
MR. QUDRATU'LLÁH RAWḤÁNÍ

FAMILIES NOT NOTIFIED OF ARRESTS, TRIAL, EXECUTIONS. BODIES BURIED UNCEREMONIOUSLY IN BARREN FIELD RESERVED BY GOVERNMENT FOR INFIDELS. INFORMATION DISCOVERED FORTUITOUSLY. GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES TOTALLY SILENT, UNCOOPERATIVE.

THIS HEINOUS ACT CAUSES US FEAR THAT MEMBERS PREVIOUS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND TWO AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS WHO DISAPPEARED AUGUST 1980, AS WELL AS TWO OTHERS WHOSE WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN OVER TWO YEARS, HAVE SUFFERED SAME FATE. NAMES THESE HEROIC DEDICATED SERVANTS BLESSED BEAUTY ARE:

AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS

DR. YÚSIF 'ABBÁSÍYÁN  
DR. ḤSHMATU'LLÁH RAWḤÁNÍ

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

DR. 'ALÍMURÁD DÁVÚDÍ  
MR. 'ABDU'L-ḤUSAYN TASLÍMÍ  
MR. ḤÚSHANG MAḤMÚDÍ  
MR. IBRÁHÍM RAHMÁNÍ  
DR. ḤUSAYN NAJÍ  
MR. MANÚCHIR QÁ'IM MAQÁMÍ  
MR. 'ATÁ'U'LLÁH MUQARRABÍ



MR. YÚSIF QADÍMÍ

MRS. BAHÍYYIH NÁDIRÍ

DR. KÁMBÍZ ŞADIQZÁDIH

MEMBER LOCAL ASSEMBLY TEHRAN

MR. RÚHÍ RAWSHANÍ

PROMINENT TEACHER

MR. MUḤAMMAD MUVAḤḤID

EXEMPLARY CHARACTER THESE SELFLESS GLORIOUS SOULS SOURCE INSPIRATION TO BAHÁ'ÍS OF WORLD. WHILE NOT ABLE WIN CROWN MARTYRDOM LIKE PERSIAN BRETHREN, VALIANT DETACHED FRIENDS EVERY LAND UNDOUBTEDLY ARE ENDEAVORING EVINCE SAME SPIRIT FOLLOW SAME PATH CONSECRATION DEDICATION GOD'S HOLY FAITH. WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT SANCTIFIED BLOOD OF THESE DESCENDANTS DAWN-BREAKERS WILL SERVE STRENGTHEN BODY CAUSE GOD THROUGHOUT GLOBE, PRODUCE UNPRECEDENTED VICTORIES TO COMPENSATE LOSSES SUSTAINED CRADLE FAITH....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

3 January 1982

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter and has asked us to assure you that you should feel no diffidence in raising the sort of questions that you have expressed. It seems clear from your letter that you have been greatly attracted to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and have accepted His Faith before, as you say, becoming "fully committed," and are, therefore, now having to face and resolve problems that many believers overcome before they declare their faith. The House of Justice urges you not to let it worry you. All through life Bahá'ís are faced with tests of many kinds, and problems and doubts, but it is through facing and overcoming them that we grow spiritually.

On the particular issues that you raise, the House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following comments.

It is true that Bahá'u'lláh lays on every Bahá'í the duty to teach His Faith. At the same time, however, we are forbidden to proselytize, so it is important for all believers to understand the difference between teaching and proselytizing. It is a significant difference and, in some countries where teaching a religion is permitted, but proselytizing is forbidden, the distinction is made in the law of the land. Proselytizing implies bringing undue pressure to bear upon someone to change his Faith. It is also usually understood to imply the making of threats or the offering of material benefits as an inducement to conversion. In some countries mission schools or hospitals, for all the good they do, are regarded with suspicion and even aversion by the local authorities because they are considered to be material inducements to conversion and hence instruments of proselytization.

Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Hidden Words*, says, "O Son of Dust! The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the beauty of his beloved....", and on page 55 of *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a letter which is primarily directed towards exhorting the friends to fulfill their responsibilities in teaching the Faith, Shoghi Effendi writes: "Care, however, should, at all times, be exercised, lest in their eagerness to further the international interests of the Faith they frustrate their purpose, and turn away, through any act that might be misconstrued as an attempt to proselytize and bring

undue pressure upon them, those whom they wish to win over to their Cause." Some Bahá'ís sometimes overstep the proper bounds, but this does not alter the clear principle.

The responsibility of the Bahá'ís to teach the Faith is very great. The contraction of the world and the onward rush of events require us to seize every chance open to us to touch the hearts and minds of our fellowmen. The Message of Bahá'u'lláh is God's guidance for mankind to overcome the difficulties of this age of transition and move forward into the next stage of its evolution, and human beings have the right to hear it. Those who accept it incur the duty of passing it on to their fellowman. The slowness of the response of the world has caused and is causing great suffering; hence the historical pressure upon Bahá'ís to exert every effort to teach the Faith for the sake of their fellowmen. They should teach with enthusiasm, conviction, wisdom and courtesy, but without pressing their hearer, bearing in mind the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "Beware lest ye contend with any one, nay, strive to make him aware of the truth with kindly manner and most convincing exhortation. If your hearer respond, he will have responded to his own behoof, and if not, turn ye away from him, and set your faces towards God's sacred Court, the seat of resplendent holiness." (*Gleanings CXXVIII*)

The application and development of the social aspects of the Teachings is dependent on the stage of growth of the Bahá'í community in each area, and on worldwide priorities. We are living in an age of transition, and as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained, we must, in order to succeed in our aims, sacrifice the important for the most important. The House of Justice, for example, had to turn down the request of certain believers to establish Bahá'í schools in a Western country which already had a functioning state educational system; those Bahá'í funds which are available for educational projects must be spent on the establishment and running of schools in areas where there are large Bahá'í communities of poor people, with no adequate system of education available to them. In its answer, the House of Justice pointed out that if these friends, on their own initiative, wished to establish their own school, run on Bahá'í lines, and financially self-supporting, they were entirely free to do so. This highlights an aspect of the matter which is often overlooked. The social services of Bahá'ís are not restricted to what they do as a community. Every Bahá'í has a duty to work and earn his living, and in choosing a career a Bahá'í should consider not only its earning capacity but also the benefit of the work to his fellowmen. All over the world Bahá'ís are rendering outstanding services in this way.

When a Bahá'í community is very small, there is little that it can do to implement the social teachings of the Faith (beyond their impact on the behavior of individual believers), because such a community with the resources in funds and manpower at its disposal is but a drop in the ocean in comparison with the many large agencies, governmental and private, which are engaged in social improvement. When the Bahá'í community grows sufficiently large, however, its activities can and must proliferate and diversify. This development is already taking place in many parts of the world. In India, for example, the New Era School in Panchgani, which has been developing remarkably for a number of years, is closely associated with a rural development project in the villages close by that is having dramatically favorable results in the life of the villagers. In the province of Madhya Pradesh, where there are hundreds of thousands of Bahá'ís, the Rabbani School in Gwalior is educating children from the villages of the area in the Teachings of the Faith,

in academic subjects and in agriculture, so that when they return to their home villages, these pupils not only promote the Faith but will influence their growth and development in every way. In Ecuador, as you no doubt know, the size of the Bahá'í community, scattered over inaccessible terrain in the high Andes, made it both necessary and possible some years ago to establish a Bahá'í radio station. "Radio Bahá'í," as it is known, broadcasts not only about the Faith, but has programs concerning health, agriculture, literacy and so on. It has now become so well established and highly regarded that it has been able to apply for and receive a Canadian Government grant through C.I.D.A to finance the development of certain social service activities. Thus it can be seen that once the Bahá'í community attains a certain stature it is able to work in fruitful collaboration with non-Bahá'í agencies in its social activities.

A further aspect of this kind of work is the collaboration between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations. Having consultative status with both ECOSOC and UNICEF, and long association with the Department of Public Information, the Bahá'í International Community is able to take part in conferences and consultations on many aspects of human development, both from the point of view of the Bahá'í Teachings and with the background of its extensive experience in meeting the problems of developing countries, such as illiteracy, the status of women, tribalism, racial prejudice, and so on.

As you can see, all these developments relate directly to the teaching work inasmuch as the Bahá'í communities must reach a certain size before they can begin to implement many of them. How, for example, can a Bahá'í community demonstrate effectively the abolition of prejudices which divide the inhabitants of a country until it has a cross-section of those inhabitants within its ranks? A seed is the vital origin of a tree and of a tremendous importance for that reason, but it cannot produce fruit until it has grown into a tree and flowered and fruited. So a Bahá'í community of nine believers is a vital step, since it can bring into being for that locality the divine institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly, but it is still only a seed, and needs to grow in size and in the diversity of its members before it can produce really convincing fruit for its fellow citizens.

One could say, however, that the Bahá'í communities could assist in social development from a very early stage in their development by supporting the activities of other groups who are, at this point, more numerous and powerful. To some extent this is true, provided that such involvement does not divert the efforts of the friends from the more fundamentally important teaching work or involve them in the disputes of non-Bahá'í rival groups.

The teaching work is of primary importance for this reason: the most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind—or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by the conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how to weld the differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort. Bahá'ís believe that God has revealed the purpose of life, has shown us how to attain it, has provided the ways in which we can work together and, beyond that, has given mankind the assurance both of continuing divine guidance and of

divine assistance. As people learn and follow these teachings their efforts will produce durable results. In the absence of these teachings, a lifetime of effort only too often ends in disillusionment and the collapse of all that has been built.

It is not easy for people to learn the Bahá'í way, to overcome their inherited prejudices or to resist their personal temptations. This way takes time, is subject to checks and backsliding, but one can see, looking at the past 138 years, that there is an overall advance that is astonishing in the light of the obstacles to be overcome, and is accelerating with every passing decade.

One of the great obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá'ís to be sucked into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them, to be influenced, for example, as you yourself pointed out, by the prevailing attitude to marriage so that the divorce rate becomes a problem within the Bahá'í community itself which should be an example to the rest of society in such matters. Involvement in politics and controversial questions is another aspect of the same phenomenon. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh warns the Bahá'ís: "Dispute not with any one concerning the things of this world and its affairs, for God hath abandoned them to such as have set their affection upon them. Out of the whole world He hath chosen for Himself the hearts of men—hearts which the hosts of revelation and of utterance can subdue." (*Gleanings* CXXVIII) As you realize, this cannot mean that Bahá'ís must not be controversial since, in many societies, being a Bahá'í is itself a controversial matter. The central importance of this principle of avoidance of politics and controversial matters is that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be drawn into the disputes of the many conflicting elements of the society around them. The aim of the Bahá'ís is to reconcile, to heal divisions, to bring about tolerance and mutual respect among men, and this aim is undermined if we allow ourselves to be swept along by the ephemeral passions of others. This does not mean that Bahá'ís cannot collaborate with any non-Bahá'í movement; it does mean that good judgment is required to distinguish those activities and associations which are beneficial and constructive from those which are divisive.

The House of Justice hopes that these explanations will help you to understand some of the aspects of the Faith that have been troubling you. The crux of the matter, as you realize, is the acceptance of spiritual authority and what this implies. You express the fear that the authority conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian and The Universal House of Justice could lead to a progressive reduction in the "available scope for personal interpretation," and that "the actual writings of the Manifestation will have less and less import," and you instance what has happened in previous Dispensations. The House of Justice suggests that, in thinking about this, you contemplate the way the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh has actually worked, and you will be able to see how very different its processes are from those of, say, the development of the law in Rabbinical Judaism or the functioning of the Papacy in Christianity. The practice in the past in these two religions, and also to a great extent in Islam, has been to assume that the Revelation given by the Founder was the final, perfect revelation of God's Will to mankind, and all subsequent elucidation and legislation has been interpretative in the sense that it aimed at applying this basic Revelation to the new problems and situations that have arisen. The Bahá'í premises are quite different. Although the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is accepted as the Word of God and His Law as the Law of God, it is understood from the outset that Revelation is progressive, and that the Law, although the Will of God for this Age, will undoubtedly be

changed by the next Manifestation of God. Secondly, only the written text of the Revelation is regarded as authoritative. There is no Oral Law as in Judaism, no Tradition of the Church as in Christianity, no Hadíth as in Islam. Thirdly, a clear distinction is drawn between interpretation and legislation. Authoritative interpretation is the exclusive prerogative of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, while infallible legislation is the function of The Universal House of Justice.

If you study the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of the Guardian, you will see how tremendously they differ from the interpretations of the Rabbis and the Church. They are not a progressive fossilization of the Revelation, they are for the most part expositions which throw a clear light upon passages which may have been considered obscure, they point up the intimate interrelationship between various teachings, they expound the implications of scriptural allusions, and they educate the Bahá'ís in the tremendous significances of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh. Rather than in any way supplanting the Words of the Manifestation, they lead us back to them time and again.

There is also an important distinction made in the Faith between authoritative interpretation, as described above, and the interpretation which every believer is fully entitled to voice. Believers are free, indeed are encouraged, to study the Writings for themselves and to express their understanding of them. Such personal interpretations can be most illuminating, but all Bahá'ís, including the one expressing the view, however learned he may be, should realize that it is only a personal view and can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should disputes ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.

The legislation enacted by The Universal House of Justice is different from interpretation. Authoritative interpretation, as uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, is a divinely guided statement of what the Word of God means. The divinely inspired legislation of The Universal House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text, and The Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. Moreover, the attitude to legislation is different in the Bahá'í Faith. The human tendency in past Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá'í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details which are considered essential, but to leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters. The Guardian used to state that the working of National Spiritual Assemblies should be uniform in essentials but that diversity in secondary matters was not only permissible but desirable. For this reason a number of points are not expressed in the National Bahá'í Constitution (the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of National Assemblies); these are left to each National Spiritual Assembly to decide for itself.

The Covenant is the “axis of the oneness of the world of humanity” because it preserves the unity and integrity of the Faith itself and protects it from being disrupted by individuals who are convinced that only their understanding of the Teachings is the right one—a fate that has overcome all past Revelations. The

Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Bahá'u'lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

The House of Justice asks us to assure you of its loving prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance in your efforts to arrive at a greater understanding of this wonderful Revelation.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

26 January 1982

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

With indignation and anguish The Bahá'ís of the World, over the past three years, have received continuously tragic news of the sufferings and martyrdoms of their brethren in Iran, where a reign of relentless terror is now encompassing that long-abused and downtrodden community. The inhuman cruelties heaped on the followers of the Most Great Name—worthy descendants of their forebears, the Dawn-Breakers—in that land where the heroes and martyrs of the Faith have shed such luster on their generations, are increasing daily. We have seen how the House of the Báb in Shiraz and Bahá'u'lláh's ancestral home in Tákur have been demolished, all Bahá'í endowments, including our Holy Places, have been seized, and the main financial assets of the community sequestered. We have seen with what callousness Bahá'í children have been refused admission to schools, Bahá'í employees dismissed from government positions, and the essential human rights of the sorely tried Bahá'ís violated, their means of livelihood undermined or destroyed, their homes plundered, their properties confiscated, their very lives snuffed out.

Contemplating the history of the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, we note an alarming acceleration in the degree of blatancy with which the traditional enemies of the Faith pursue their single purpose of extirpating the Faith in the land of its birth. In the past, with the exception of a few specific instances, the persecution of the members of the Bahá'í community by those traditionally inimical to the Faith, was random and sporadic, resulting from the incitement of easily aroused mobs to attack the lives and properties of the Bahá'ís.

Now the enemies of God's precious Cause who, as they themselves attest, have in the past twenty-five years organized themselves to counteract the influence of the Faith, to vilify and misrepresent its purpose and teachings, to inflame religious passions leading to the harassment and intimidation of the believers, to sow seeds of doubt among the friends and sympathizers, have infiltrated the ranks of officialdom, where, from this more advantageous position, they continue to instigate the persecution of the Bahá'ís. The incidence of violation of the rights of the Bahá'ís is thus becoming more frequent as is well evidenced by reports published in the press of Iran in recent months. Examples abound. For instance, formerly when Bahá'ís were arrested they were given an opportunity to defend themselves in some form of judicial proceedings held for the sake of appearances. On one occasion part of the proceedings which resulted in the execution of seven believers in Yazd, as late as September 1980, was televised. But recently the court proceedings, if any, have been held in camera, and reports have even been received of the torture of Bahá'ís before their execution. No longer are the relatives of imprisoned Bahá'ís permitted to visit them, as they were until



recently; no longer are the condemned permitted to solace their families with letters of farewell or the making of wills before their execution; and, more tragically, disturbed by the large number of Bahá'ís and sympathetic people of other religions who attended the funeral services of the slain Bahá'ís, the authorities have now seized the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran and do not permit burial there. Indeed, the families of those most recently martyred were not even notified of the secret execution of their loved ones, whose bodies, unceremoniously deposited in graves for "infidels," were only fortuitously discovered.

Although the oppressors maintain that they are killing the Bahá'ís because they are guilty of serving as political agents and spies, it has been ascertained that in almost every instance of execution, the accused Bahá'í was offered recantation as a means of release.

The inveterate enemies of the Faith imagine that their persecutions will disrupt the foundations of the Faith and tarnish its glory. Alas! Alas for their ignorance and folly! These acts of oppression, far from weakening the resolve of the friends, have always served to inflame their zeal and galvanize their beings. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "... they thought that violence and interference would cause extinction and silence and lead to suppression and oblivion; whereas interference in matters of conscience causes stability and firmness and attracts the attention of men's sight and souls; which fact has received experimental proof many times and often."

Every drop of blood shed by the valiant martyrs, every sigh heaved by the silent victims of oppression, every supplication for divine assistance offered by the faithful, has released, and will continue mysteriously to release, forces over which no antagonist of the Faith has any control, and which, as marshaled by an All-Watchful Providence, have served to noise abroad the name and fame of the Faith to the masses of humanity in all continents, millions of whom had previously been totally ignorant of the existence of the Faith or had but a superficial, and oft-times erroneous, understanding of its teachings and history.

The current persecution has resulted in bringing the name and character of our beloved Faith to the attention of the world as never before in its history. As a direct result of the protests sent by the worldwide community of the Most Great Name to the rulers in Iran, of the representations made to the media when those protests were ignored, of direct approach by Bahá'í institutions at national and international levels to governments, communities of nations, international agencies and the United Nations itself, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has not only been given sympathetic attention in the world's councils, but also its merits and violated rights have been discussed and resolutions of protest sent to the Iranian authorities by sovereign governments, singly and in unison. The world's leading newspapers, followed by the local press, have presented sympathetic accounts of the Faith to millions of readers, while television and radio stations are increasingly making the persecutions in Iran the subject of their programs. Commercial publishing houses are beginning to commission books about the Faith.

But in spite of this great wave of publicity now bringing the name of the Faith to the attention of large masses of mankind, and in spite of the many representations made to the authorities in Iran, the persecution of the Bahá'ís there continues. The world stands helpless before the imperviousness of that country to outside opinion or criticism. In face of this tragic impasse we can only redouble our efforts to

teach the Cause, taking advantage of the increasing interest in the character and principles of our beloved Faith created by the sufferings of the Persian community.

Indeed, this new wave of persecution sweeping the Cradle of the Faith may well be seen as a blessing in disguise, a “providence” whose “calamity” is, as always, borne heroically by the beloved Persian community. It may be regarded as the latest move in God’s Major Plan, another trumpet blast to awaken the heedless from their slumber and a golden opportunity offered to the Bahá’ís to demonstrate once again their unity and fellowship before the eyes of a declining and skeptical world, to proclaim with full force the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to high and low alike, to establish the reverence of our Faith for Islam and its Prophet, to assert the principles of noninterference in political activities and obedience to government which stand at the very core of our Faith, and to provide comfort and solace to the breasts of the serene sufferers and steadfast heroes in the forefront of a persecuted community. Our motto in these days of world-encircling gloom should be the Words of God addressed to the Blessed Beauty Himself: “When the swords flash, go forward! When the shafts fly, press onward!”

Future historians will have to assess the impact of this crisis on the onward march of a triumphant Faith. A detailed list of the steps that have already been taken by The Bahá’ís of the World during the past three years is attached for the study of the friends.

Our fervent prayers are offered most ardently at the Holy Shrines for the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh to surround His lovers and loved ones in every land, and to assist and confirm them as they face with certitude and confidence the challenges of the future.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Summary of Actions Taken by the Bahá’í International Community, National and Local Bahá’í Institutions, Governments, Non-Bahá’í Organizations and Prominent People in Connection with the Persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran

**The Bahá’í International Community**

- Issued official statements to the press;
- kept the Secretary-General and appropriate offices of the United Nations apprised of developments as they occurred;

- cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, the President and Prime Minister of Iran, and the President of the Iranian Supreme Court, urging their intervention and refuting accusations made against the Faith;
- prepared materials and made statements in connection with the adoption of resolutions by the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- made statements at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the Question of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances;
- contacted the Iranian representative to the United Nations in New York in order to repudiate falsehoods made about the Faith and provide him with the true facts;
- and prepared the “White Paper” and “Update” and arranged for their translation in three languages, the “Chronological Summary of Individual Acts of Persecution in Iran,” and other documents for submission to high-ranking officials, government and United Nations offices, and worldwide distribution To National Spiritual Assemblies.

### **Bahá’í Institutions**

- National Assemblies throughout the world cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini on four occasions, the Prime Minister and Head of the Iranian Supreme Court three times each, and the Secretary of the Revolutionary Council of Iran once.
- 118 National Spiritual Assemblies cabled the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as did thousands of Local Assemblies, Bahá’í groups and isolated centers. It was estimated that some 10–15,000 cables reached him, protesting the execution of seven Bahá’ís in Hamadan.
- Over 10,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, urging his intervention regarding the expropriation of Bahá’í properties in Iran.
- Most National Assemblies contacted by letter or delegation, or sent cables to their respective Iranian Embassy or Consulate, on five occasions and kept their government officials continually informed of developments.

- Selected National Assemblies cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, the President and the Prime Minister of Iran, and the Secretary of the Revolutionary Council on several occasions. They also cabled or contacted their respective Iranian Embassy or Consulate at least eleven times; approached humanitarian, business or professional organizations; and were in constant touch with government offices and the media.
- A large number of National Assemblies pursued a well organized campaign of approaching the mass media, providing them with accurate information about the Faith and refuting false accusations made by enemies of the Cause. As a result, an unprecedented volume of publicity occurred in leading newspapers and periodicals throughout the world, as well as in newspapers having modest circulations. Well-known journalists wrote articles, some of which were distributed through international news agencies. Interviews were held with families of the martyrs, individual Bahá'ís wrote letters to editors of newspapers, and many radio and television programs were aired, including "Iran's Secret Pogrom" on W5 TV in Canada, and "Day One" and "John Craven's Newsround" on BBC TV.
- Many National Assemblies contacted immigration authorities and appropriate government offices in efforts to assist the displaced Iranian Bahá'ís in extending their visas and obtaining work permits and travel documents. They established special committees to work specifically to assist the Iranian friends, and they set up Persian Relief Funds on a national scale to aid deserving cases. The National Assemblies of Australia and Canada worked out with their respective immigration offices procedures whereby the process of immigration by Iranian Bahá'ís would be facilitated.
- Bahá'í communities the world over have assisted Iranian students abroad, who have been faced with the termination of their education because they are unable to receive funds from their families in Iran whose assets in Nawnahálán Company were frozen, or did not receive funds because the Iranian government prevented the transfer of money from Iran to Bahá'í students abroad. In some areas, Iranian embassies have refused to extend the visas of Bahá'í students. Certain universities and colleges have allowed the Bahá'í students to continue their studies, and in some instances their tuition fees have even been waived.

### **Resolutions Adopted on Behalf of the Bahá'ís in Iran**

- Canadian Parliament (2)

- House of Representatives, Australia
  - Senate, Australia
  - German Federal Parliament
  - A meeting held in a committee room of the House of Commons, United Kingdom
  - United Nations General Assembly, Third Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance
  - United Nations Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Commission on Human Rights (2)
  - European Parliament (2)
  - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2)
- 
- House of Representatives of the State of Alaska, U.S.A.
  - House of Representatives, State of Illinois, U.S.A.
  - International Association for Religious Freedom

### **Statements and Letters from Governments, World Leaders and Others**

- To name just a few
- Prime Minister's Office of the United Kingdom
- President Mitterrand of France
- Offices of the King and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium

- President and Minister of Cultural Affairs of Luxembourg
- All three parliamentary parties in Luxembourg
- Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of Germany
- Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India
- 148 out of 150 Members of Parliament in the Netherlands
- Swiss Parliamentarians
- Western Samoan Government
- Minister of Foreign Affairs, Australia
- Governor of the Hawaiian Islands, U.S.A.
- Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

**Some Non-Bahá'í Individuals and Organizations that Issued Statements, Letters, Cables, or Press Releases**

- Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland
- Amnesty International
- Trinidad and Tobago Bureau on Human Rights
- Former Chief Justice, India
- Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
- Pacific Conference of Churches
- 13 Heads of Colleges in Oxford, U.K.
- The Master, Balliol College, Oxford, England
- Iran Committee for Democratic Action and Human Rights (based in the United States)
- Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (based in France)

- A large number of Senators and Congressmen of the United States

The Universal House of Justice

9 March 1982

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

ACCOUNTS HEROISM BELIEVERS CRADLE FAITH FILL OUR HEARTS WITH FEELINGS OF AWE, GRATITUDE, ADMIRATION. MOUNTING CRUELITIES OPPRESSORS MATCHED BY HEIGHTENED ENDURANCE STEADFASTNESS STAUNCH SUPPORTERS GREATEST NAME.

SINCE LAST REPORT ON 11 JANUARY 1982 CROWN MARTYRDOM HAS ADORNED TWO MORE LOVING SOULS, ḤUSAYN VAḤDAT-I-ḤAQQ OF TEHRAN AND IBRÁHÍM KHAYRKHÁH OF BÁBULSAR. THE FORMER, A HIGHLY QUALIFIED ELECTRONICS ENGINEER, WAS EXECUTED ON 28 FEBRUARY, EVE OBSERVANCE DECLARATION BÁB ACCORDING LUNAR CALENDAR, AND MR. KHAYRKHÁH, ACTIVE BELIEVER CASPIAN AREA, TWO DAYS EARLIER. BOTH EXECUTED BURIED UNCEREMONIOUSLY WITHOUT RELATIVES FRIENDS BEING INFORMED.

CONFISCATION OF HOMES INNOCENT BAHÁ'ÍS WITHOUT PROVOCATION IS CONTINUING. LOOTING AND AUCTIONING OF FURNISHINGS OF BAHÁ'Í HOME IN ARDIKÁN NEAR YAZD WAS PRELUDE TO SERIES SIMILAR RAIDS ON HOMES OTHER BAHÁ'ÍS THAT TOWN. IN SHIRAZ 17 MORE HOMES EITHER CONFISCATED OR IN PROCESS CONFISCATION. 35 ADDITIONAL BANK ACCOUNTS OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN SHIRAZ NOW FROZEN. SCORES OF BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS OR BEEN DEPRIVED THEIR BUSINESS AND TRADE LICENSES. ON ONE OCCASION A HIGH-RANKING AUTHORITY DECREED, IN REPLY TO QUESTION FROM INSURANCE COMPANY, THAT A BAHÁ'Í WIDOW HAD NO RIGHT COLLECT HALF HER HUSBAND'S PENSION DUE HER NOR RETAIN CUSTODY HER CHILDREN. HISTORIC BAHÁ'Í SITES PROGRESSIVELY BEING DEMOLISHED INCLUDING HOUSE BÁBÍYYIH IN MASHHAD.

IN FACE SUCH OPPRESSIVE MEASURES, THOUSANDS BAHÁ'ÍS IRAN UNMINDFUL OF POSSIBLE DIRE CONSEQUENCES, HAVE COURAGEOUSLY APPEALED BY LETTER OR CABLE TO VARIOUS HIGH OFFICIALS AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS COMPLAINING ABOUT BARBARIC ACTS GROSS INJUSTICE, HAVE REVEALED THEIR NAMES AND ADDRESSES, AND HAVE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT FEAR GOD WILL ULTIMATELY AWAKEN BLOODTHIRSTY AND HATE-FILLED INDIVIDUALS TO DISGRACEFUL ABUSE THEIR POWERS AND INDUCE THEM CEASE BEHAVIOR ABHORRENT ALL CIVILIZED PEOPLE.

BAHÁ'ÍS IRAN ARE GRATEFUL THEIR BRETHREN THROUGHOUT WORLD BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT ONLY SUCCESSFULLY RAISED THEIR VOICES IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FORUMS BUT ALSO HAVE PLEDGED REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS SERVE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN NAME COWORKERS CRADLE FAITH, IN ORDER TO COUNTERACT EVIL MACHINATIONS ENEMIES CAUSE DESIGNED ERADICATE FAITH IN LAND ITS BIRTH.

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 worldwide 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 Center, 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 Counselors is proving an unqualified success and we express our warm thanks and admiration to the International Teaching Centre and all the Counselors 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 June 1982

To the Friends gathered at the International Conference in Dublin

Dearly loved Friends,

“The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day.... Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly.” The shattering blows dealt to the old, divisive system of the planet and the constantly accelerating decline in civilized life since that dire warning was uttered by Bahá’u’lláh a hundred years ago, have brought mankind to its present appalling condition. Consideration of how the Bahá’ís of Europe, confronted by this situation, can meet their responsibilities, spiritually and actively, is the main purpose of this Conference.

The holding of this Conference in Dublin calls to mind the historic and heroic services of Ireland in spreading the divine religion throughout pagan Europe. Europe’s response was to develop, through many vicissitudes, the most widespread and effective civilization known. That civilization, together with all other systems in the world, is now being rolled up, and Europe’s plight in proportion to her former preeminence, is desperate indeed. By the same token her opportunity is correspondingly great. The challenges to her resilience, to her deep-seated spiritual vitality, nourished over the centuries by the Teachings of Christ—now, alas, neglected and even contemned—can and must call forth a more magnificent response than was ever made by the divided and contending peoples of olden times. Yours is the task to arouse that response. The power of Bahá’u’lláh is with you and this Day, as attested by the Báb, is “immensely exalted ... above the days of the Apostles of old.”

In this great Day Europe is blessed as never before in its history, for the Manifestation of God, the Lord of Hosts, spent five years of His exiles within its borders, sending forth from His “remote prison” the first of those challenging, world-shaking addresses to the kings and rulers, six of whom were European potentates. There is no authenticated record of a Manifestation of God ever before setting foot in Europe.

You are engaged on a Seven Year Plan and have made devoted and sacrificial efforts to attain its objectives. But its ultimate purpose, as that of all other plans, namely the attracting of the masses of mankind to the all-embracing shelter of the Cause of God, still evades us. Particularly in Europe. We have not, as yet, found the secret of setting aglow the hearts of great numbers of Europeans with the divine fire. This must now be your constant preoccupation, the subject of your deliberations at this Conference, the purpose of your lives, to which you will attain “only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire.” We call upon every Bahá’í in Europe to ponder this vital matter in his inmost soul, to consider what each may do to attract greater power to his efforts, to radiate more brilliantly and irresistibly the joyous, regenerating power of the Cause, so that the Bahá’í community in every country of Europe may stand out as a beacon

light repelling the dark shadows of godlessness and moral degradation now threatening to obliterate the last remnants of a dying order. We call upon the Continental Board of Counselors to consult following this Conference with every National Spiritual Assembly in Europe, and together, launch such a campaign of spiritualization of the Bahá'í community, allied with intensified personal teaching, as has never been witnessed in your continent. The goals of the Seven Year Plan can all be accomplished as the result of such a program and the European Bahá'í community may achieve through it the spiritual force and character to demonstrate to a stricken and declining civilization the peace and joy and order of the long-awaited, Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth.

May the loving spirit and saintly life of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the fiftieth anniversary of whose ascension is commemorated in this Conference, imbue your thoughts and aspirations and resolves with that dedicated, self-sacrificing, utter devotion to Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause which she so greatly exemplified.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

3 June 1982

[To individuals]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to acknowledge your letter of April 28 and to make the following comments concerning your three questions.

It was the express wish of Bahá'u'lláh that after Him the friends should “turn” to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Bahá'u'lláh also said in His Book of Laws that anything that was not clear in His Writings should be “referred” to His Most Mighty Branch springing from the Ancient Root. (See *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 134–35.) In one of the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá published in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (page 214) He quotes the passages mentioned above and interprets them to mean that “whatever He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] saith is the very truth.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further says, referring to those who do not accept Him as the Interpreter of the Word of God, “Whoso deviates from my interpretation is a victim of his own fancy” (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 138). Moreover, in the *Star of the West*, Volume 12, page 227, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá interprets the verses from the “Tablet of the Branch” to mean “whatsoever His [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s] pen records, that is correct.”

There is nothing in the Writings that would lead us to the conclusion that what Shoghi Effendi says about himself concerning statements on subjects not directly related to the Faith also applies to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Instead we have assertions which indicate that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s position in the Faith is one for which we find “no parallel” in past Dispensations. For example, Bahá'u'lláh, in addition to His reference to the Center of His Covenant as the “Mystery of God,” states that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be regarded as God’s “exalted Handiwork” and “a Word which God hath adorned with the ornament of His Own Self, and made it sovereign over the earth and all that there is therein.” And from Shoghi Effendi we have the incontrovertible statement that the Guardian of the Faith while “overshadowed” by the “protection” of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb, “remains essentially human,” whereas in respect of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Shoghi Effendi categorically states that “in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”

With reference to your question about the “ether,” the various definitions of this word as given in the Oxford English Dictionary all refer to a physical reality, for instance, “an element,” “a substance,” “a medium,” all of which imply a physical and objective reality and, as you say, this was the concept posited by

nineteenth century scientists to explain the propagation of light waves. It would have been understood in this sense by the audiences whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá was addressing. However, in Chapter XVI of *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá devotes a whole chapter to explaining the difference between things which are "perceptible to the senses" which He calls "objective or sensible," and realities of the "intellect" which have "no outward form and no place," and are "not perceptible to the senses." He gives examples of both "kinds" of "human knowledge." The first kind is obvious and does not need elaboration. To illustrate the second kind the examples He gives are: love, grief, happiness, the power of the intellect, the human spirit and "ethereal matter." (In the original Persian the word "ethereal" is the same as "etheric.") He states clearly that "Even ethereal matter, the forces of which are said in physics to be heat, light, electricity and magnetism, is an intellectual reality, and is not sensible." In other words, the "ether" is a concept arrived at intellectually to explain certain phenomena. In due course, when scientists failed to confirm the physical existence of the "ether" by delicate experiments, they constructed other intellectual concepts to explain the same phenomena.

In considering the whole field of divinely conferred "infallibility" one must be careful to avoid the literal understanding and petty-mindedness that has so often characterized discussions of this matter in the Christian world. The Manifestation of God (and, to a lesser degree, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi,) has to convey tremendous concepts covering the whole field of human life and activity to people whose present knowledge and degree of understanding are far below His. He must use the limited medium of human language against the limited and often erroneous background of His audience's traditional knowledge and current understanding to raise them to a wholly new level of awareness and behavior. It is a human tendency, against which the Manifestation warns us, to measure His statements against the inaccurate standard of the acquired knowledge of mankind. We tend to take them and place them within one or other of the existing categories of human philosophy or science while, in reality, they transcend these and will, if properly understood, open new and vast horizons to our understanding.

Some sayings of the Manifestation are clear and obvious. Among these are laws of behavior. Others are elucidations which lead men from their present level of understanding to a new one. Others are pregnant allusions, the significance of which only becomes apparent as the knowledge and understanding of the reader grow. And all are integral parts of one great Revelation intended to raise mankind to a new level of its evolution.

It may well be that we shall find some statement is couched in terms familiar to the audience to which it was first addressed, but is strange now to us. For example, in answer to a question about Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the "fourth heaven" in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

As to the ascent of Christ to the fourth heaven, as revealed in the glorious "Book of Íqán," he [the Guardian] stated that the "fourth heaven" is a term used and a belief held by the early astronomers. The followers of the Shí'ih sect likewise held this belief. As the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* was revealed for the guidance of that sect, this term was used in conformity with the concepts of its followers.

(Translated from the Arabic)

In studying such statements, however, we must have the humility to appreciate the limitations of our own knowledge and outlook, and strive always to understand the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh in making them, trying to look upon Him with His own eyes, as it were.

It is hoped that the above explanations will prove useful to you in your study of the subjects in which you have expressed interest.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



Department of the Secretariat

2 August 1982

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 17 June 1982 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

The House of Justice is very sorry to learn that the problems which you instance have become a threat to the unity of your Assembly, and it hopes and prays that this difficulty will quickly be overcome. It feels that there are a number of distinct but related principles which are involved in the situations you describe, and that the issues will become clearer if they are considered separately.

Every institution in the Faith has certain matters which it considers should be kept confidential, and any member who is privy to such confidential information is obliged to preserve the confidentiality within the institution where he learned it. Such matters, however, are but a small portion of the business of any Bahá'í institution. Most subjects dealt with are of common interest and can be discussed openly with anyone. Where no confidentiality is involved the institutions must strive to avoid the stifling atmosphere of secrecy; on the other hand, every believer must know that he can confide a personal problem to an institution of the Faith, with the assurance that knowledge of the matter will remain confidential.

Members of Assemblies, whether they are assistants or not, are obviously in a position to receive confidential information as individuals from several sources. It is an important principle of the Faith that one must not promise what one is not going to fulfill. Therefore, if a Bahá'í accepts confidential information either by virtue of his profession (e.g., as a doctor, a lawyer, etc.), or by permitting another person to confide in him, he is in duty bound to preserve that confidentiality.

In the relationship between assistants and the National Spiritual Assembly no problems should arise, because the functions are entirely separate. An assistant is appointed by an Auxiliary Board member to help him in a specified area of the territory and he functions as an assistant only in relation to that area. Assistants, like Auxiliary Board members, function individually, not as a consultative body. Assistants who are members of a National Assembly or a national committee do not function as assistants in relation to that body, and they have the same duty to observe the confidentiality of its consultations, and of matters considered by the Assembly to be confidential, as does any other member. An assistant can, of course, be a

member of a Local Spiritual Assembly, but his task here as an assistant is to help the Spiritual Assembly to function harmoniously and efficiently in the discharge of its duties and this will hardly succeed if he gives the Assembly the feeling that he is reporting privately everything it does to the Auxiliary Board member. He should, on the contrary, do all he can to foster an atmosphere of warm and loving collaboration between the Local Assembly and the Board member.

In answer to your fourth question the House of Justice instructs us to say that an element of judgment is required in deciding what are and what are not “administrative” matters. Immoral actions of believers, for example, generally become subjects for administrative action only when they are blatant or flagrant, and reflect on the good name of the Faith. If a believer turns to an assistant or Auxiliary Board member for advice on a personal matter it is for the assistant or Auxiliary Board member to decide whether he should advise the believer to turn to his Spiritual Assembly, whether he should himself give advice and, in either case, whether he should report the matter to the Counselors, or to the Local Assembly, which, of course, would depend upon the degree of confidentiality he had undertaken to observe. Likewise, it is for the Counselor to decide whether it is a matter of which the National Assembly should be informed. All this is, of course, within the general context that, apart from matters which ought to remain confidential, the more freely information is shared between the institutions of the Faith the better.

National Assembly members themselves must exercise such discretion, and it should be clear to the believers that they are not justified in assuming that because a matter is known to individual members of the Assembly it is therefore before the Assembly itself. If a believer wishes to bring a matter to the Assembly’s attention he should do so explicitly and officially. If a member of the Assembly knows of a personal problem, and if he has not undertaken to keep it confidential, he may bring it to the Assembly’s attention if he feels it would be in the interests of the Faith for him to do so, but he is not obliged to.

The House of Justice does not wish to elaborate these comments beyond the above, and believes that your Assembly will be able to answer the questions that you pose in the light of these principles. The House of Justice will pray in the Holy Shrines for speedy strengthening of the unity of your Assembly and for the growth of closer collaboration between your body and the Board of Counselors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

6 August 1982

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the International Conference in Quito, Ecuador

Beloved Friends,

We hail with joyous hearts and eager anticipation the soldiers of Bahá'u'lláh's army of light gathered together in Quito, the capital city of the Republic of Ecuador, to do honor and homage to the blessed memory of Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, the most outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, the fiftieth anniversary of whose ascension was so recently commemorated throughout the world.

Conscious of the beloved Master's plea to promulgate the oneness of mankind to a spiritually impoverished humanity, inspired by the memory of the Hand of the Cause Dr. Raḥmatu'lláh Muhájir whose mortal remains are interred in the soil of Quito, and deriving spiritual stimulus from the Mother Temple for Latin America, the friends are reminded of the galvanizing words of our beloved Guardian addressed to "the eager, the warm-hearted, the spiritually minded and staunch members of these Latin American Bahá'í communities": "Let them ponder the honor which the Author of the Revelation Himself has chosen to confer upon their countries, the obligations which that honor automatically brings in its wake, the opportunities it offers, the power it releases for the removal of all obstacles, however formidable, which may be encountered in their path, and the promise of guidance it implies ..."

Praiseworthy indeed are the achievements thus far made by the communities of South and Central America and the islands of the Caribbean in the first half of the Seven Year Plan. Full advantage should be taken of the current high tide of proclamation engendered by the crisis in Iran to attract to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh earnest and seeking souls from every stratum of society, thereby enriching the spiritual and material diversity of our communities. Great effort should be made to utilize more fully the valuable possibilities of radio and television as a means of reaching the vast multitudes whose hearts and minds offer fertile soil for the planting of the seeds of the Faith. All elements of the Bahá'í community, particularly the women and youth, should arise as one soul to shoulder the responsibilities laid upon them. All outstanding goals of the Seven Year Plan should be pursued with enthusiasm and assurance of their accomplishment.

All National Spiritual Assemblies during the remaining fast-fleeting years of this radiant century, in collaboration with the Institutions of the Faith standing ready and eager to assist them, must greatly reinforce the foundations of maturing National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to enable them to cope successfully with the multifarious and challenging problems that will confront them.

At a moment in Bahá'í history when the persecuted, beleaguered friends in the Cradle of the Faith heroically continue to face the trials ordained for them in the Major Plan of God, meeting martyrdom, as

need be, with joyous acceptance, it behooves the friends throughout the Bahá'í world to endeavor by their own greatly increased acts of self-abnegation to make fruitful the spiritual energies released by the sacrifices of their stricken brethren.

May you all immerse yourselves in the spirit of the saintly life of the Greatest Holy Leaf, whose self-sacrificing devotion to her beloved Father's Cause is a worthy example for every believer to emulate.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

19 August 1982

To the Friends gathered at the Bahá'í International Conference at Lagos

Dearly loved Friends,

With hearts overflowing with love for the people of Africa, so richly endowed with the gifts of the spirit, so abundantly and repeatedly blessed since the dawn of this Revelation, and so gloriously promising in the unfoldment of their hidden potentialities, we welcome the friends gathered at this Conference held in one of the most important capitals of their emergent continent.

As we review the annals of our Faith we see that since the days of the Blessed Beauty and up to the early 1950s, the activities of the friends in Africa had produced the formation of one National Spiritual Assembly with its seat in Cairo, Egypt, the opening of 12 countries to the light of the Faith, and some 50 localities established throughout its vast lands. It was at such a time that the beloved Guardian ushered in the first African Teaching Plan, to be followed during the remaining years of his ministry and in subsequent years after his passing, by a series of challenging and bravely executed plans designed to implant the banner of the Faith throughout the length and breadth of that continent and its neighboring islands. Today, after the lapse of a little over three decades, we stand in awe as we view with admiration one of the most valiant contingents of the Army of Light, guided by its own Board of Counselors, led and administered by 37 National Spiritual Assemblies and 4990 Local Spiritual Assemblies, privileged to serve an eager and radiant community of believers drawn from 1152 African tribes residing in 29,000 localities.

How wonderful that it has been possible to convene this Conference on African soil with such a large number of African friends in attendance, in loving memory of the most distinguished heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, the eldest daughter of the King of Glory, who lived a long life of sacrificial service to the Cause of her Beloved Father. Her meekness, her unassuming nature, the purity of her soul, the sensitivity of her heart, the calmness of her demeanor, her patience and long-suffering in trials, and above all, her unshakable faith, her tenderness and love, and the spirit of self-renunciation which she evinced throughout her blessed life, are outstanding characteristics that we can well emulate, particularly in Africa, where these heavenly qualities play such an important part in attracting the souls and winning the hearts to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

We rejoice in the knowledge that some communities have already initiated in her name teaching and consolidation campaigns of far-reaching magnitude; that many Bahá'í women, inspired by her example, are accepting an ever-greater share of responsibility in running the affairs of the community; and that numerous newsletters are reflecting eulogies of the station she occupied, the sufferings she endured, and the heroism she demonstrated in her love for the glorious Cause of her Lord.

The fortunes of the Seven Year Plan in Africa are in the balance. As we draw near to the midway point in the unfoldment of the processes it has set in motion, we call upon its valiant promoters on the African mainland and its surrounding islands, to take stock of their position, to reappraise their progress, and to concentrate their resources on whatever portions of the goals are as yet unachieved. Chief among its objectives are a widespread recruitment of many more supporters of the Most Great Name, the deepening of the individual believers, for the fulfillment of all goals ultimately depends upon them, and a notable increase in the number of newly formed as well as firmly rooted Local Spiritual Assemblies, to serve as bases for the manifold activities of the community, including the Bahá'í education of children, a greater participation of women and youth in Bahá'í activities, and the formulation of ways and means to enrich the spiritual lives of the "noble" and "purehearted" believers of a "FAST-AWAKENING CONTINENT!"

May the participants in this Conference carry to the mass of their devoted fellow believers, whose personal circumstances have made it impossible for them to attend, the spirit of joy and optimism which we hope will be generated at this gathering and the flames of enthusiasm which we pray will be enkindled in their hearts.

May the memory of the Greatest Holy Leaf, who through her life of heroic self-sacrifice has left to us "a legacy that time can never dim," inspire the friends in every country of the continent to rededicate themselves to the Cause of God, not to allow any opportunity for mentioning the Faith to slip by unutilized, and not to permit one day of their lives to pass without a noble effort to draw nearer to the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty.

Our fervent prayers surround you as you proceed with your deliberations.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 September 1982

To the Friends gathered in the Asian-Australasian Bahá'í Conference in Canberra

Dearly loved Friends,

These are momentous times. The institutions of the old world order are crumbling and in disarray. Materialism, greed, corruption and conflict are infecting the social order with a grave malaise from which it is helpless to extricate itself. With every passing day it becomes more and more evident that no time must be lost in applying the remedy prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh, and it is to this task that Bahá'ís everywhere must bend their energies and commit their resources.

New conditions now present themselves, making it easier to accomplish our purpose. Galvanized by the fires of fierce opposition and nurtured by the blood of the martyrs, the forces of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh are, at long last, emerging from obscurity. Never before in history has the Faith been the subject of such universal attention and comment. Eminent statesmen, parliamentarians, journalists, writers, educators, commentators, clergymen and other leaders of thought have raised their voices and set their pens to expressions of horror and revulsion at the persecutions of our brethren in Iran on the one hand, and to paeans of praise and admiration of the noble principles which motivate the followers of the Most Great Name on the other.

The five international conferences of the Seven Year Plan were called to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf, to discuss anew the present condition of the Faith in a turbulent world society, to examine the great opportunities for its future growth and development, and to focus attention on the unfulfilled goals of the Plan. We are certain that the contemplation of the gathered friends on the sterling qualities which distinguished the heroic life of the Greatest Holy Leaf will help them to persevere in their noble endeavors.

This particular Conference is unique in many ways. The geographical area of concern spans over half the globe, including within its purview all the vast continent of Asia as well as the water hemisphere which comprises all of Australasia. Within the continent of Asia is the "cradle of the principal religions of mankind ... above whose horizons, in modern times, the suns of two independent Revelations ... have successively arisen ... on whose Western extremity the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world has been definitely established ..." The first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world was erected on this continent under the direction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and now another is arising on the Indian subcontinent in the midst of the world's largest Bahá'í community. In Australasia the Mother Temple of the Antipodes, dedicated to the Glory of God just two decades ago, looks out across the vast Pacific Ocean in whose "midmost heart" still another Mashriqu'l-

Adhkár is being built on the mountain slope above Apia in the country of the first reigning monarch to embrace the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The population of Asia and Australasia is well over half the world population. The area includes Asiatic U.S.S.R. and mainland China, accounting for more than one thousand million souls who are, for the most part, untouched by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Obviously present conditions in these areas call for the exercise of the utmost wisdom and circumspection. Yet this vast segment of humanity cannot be ignored.

Canberra, where you are now meeting, is at the southern pole of the spiritual axis referred to in the beloved Guardian's last message to the Bahá'ís of Australia as "extending from the Antipodes to the northern islands of the Pacific Ocean." Referring to the National Spiritual Assemblies at the northern and southern poles of that axis, Shoghi Effendi went on to say:

A responsibility, at once weighty and inescapable, must rest on the communities which occupy so privileged a position in so vast and turbulent an area of the globe. However great the distance that separates them; however much they differ in race, language, custom, and religion; however active the political forces which tend to keep them apart and foster racial and political antagonisms, the close and continued association of these communities in their common, their peculiar and paramount task of raising up and of consolidating the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh in those regions of the globe, is a matter of vital and urgent importance, which should receive on the part of the elected representatives of their communities, a most earnest and prayerful consideration.

These guidelines, penned a quarter of a century ago, are as valid today as when they were written, and can be taken to heart by all Bahá'í communities on either side of the axis.

We are approaching the midway point of the Seven Year Plan. As we review our accomplishments with respect to the goals of that Plan, it is essential that we fortify ourselves for the tasks ahead, and that we rededicate ourselves to that Cause for which our beloved martyrs rendered their last full measure of devotion. We can do no less!

We shall be with you in spirit during your important deliberations. Our prayers ascend at the Holy Threshold for the success of your Conference and the International Conference being held concurrently in Montreal. We shall ardently supplicate that the blessings and confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh will descend upon you and surround you wherever you go in service to His Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



2 September 1982

To the Friends gathered at the Bahá'í International Conference in Montreal

Dearly loved Friends,

Seventy years ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Montreal, hallowing it forever. The visit of the beloved Master to America, the laying by Him of the cornerstone of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the West and the revelation by Him five years later of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, which invest its chief executors and their allies with spiritual primacy, constitute successive stages in the gradual disclosure of a mission whose seeds can be found in the Báb's address to the people of the West, urging them to aid God's Holy Cause. This mission was given specific direction through Bahá'u'lláh's summons to the rulers of America, calling on them to heal the injuries of the oppressed and, with the "rod of the commandments" of their Lord, to bring their corrective influence to bear upon the injustices perpetrated by the tyrannical and the ungodly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed in clearer details than those given by either the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh the nature and scope of that glorious mission. In His eternal Tablets unveiling America's spiritual destiny the Master wrote, "The continent of America is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, where the righteous will abide and the free assemble. Therefore, every section thereof is blessed ..." and, referring to Canada, He asserted that its future "is very great, and the events connected with it infinitely glorious." Even more specifically, He expressed the "hope that in the future Montreal may become so stirred, that the melody of the Kingdom may travel to all parts of the world from that Dominion and the breaths of the Holy Spirit may spread from that center to the East and the West of America."

After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and under the guidance of the Guardian The Bahá'ís of the World witnessed with awe and admiration the North American community arising as one man to champion the Administrative Order taking shape on their own soil, to embark upon the first collective teaching plan in the annals of the Faith, to lead the entire Bahá'í world in intercontinental teaching campaigns, to demonstrate with devotion their exemplary firmness in the Covenant, to extend their support and protection and relief to the oppressed followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the East and particularly in His native land, and to send forth valiant pioneers and traveling teachers to every continent of the globe. These marvelous and noble exertions, calling for the expenditure of resources almost beyond their means, paved the way for the achievement of glorious victories which synchronized with a series of world convulsions, signs of universal commotion and travail, and with repeated crises within the Faith. And in this day, while the blood of the martyrs of Persia is once again watering the roots of the Cause of God and when the international outlook is impenetrably and ominously dark, the Bahá'ís of North America are in the van of the embattled legions of the Cause.

Less than a score of years remain until the end of this century which the Master called “the century of light,” and He clearly foresaw that ere its termination an advanced stage would have been reached in the striving towards the political, racial, and religious unity of the peoples of the world, unfolding new horizons in scientific accomplishments, universal undertakings and world solidarity. The calls of the Master and the Guardian plainly summon the Bahá’ís of the Americas to prodigies of proclamation, of teaching and of service. The American melting pot of peoples needs the unifying power of the new Faith of God to achieve its fusion. The representative character of the Bahá’í community should therefore be reinforced through the attraction, conversion and support of an ever-growing number of new believers from the diverse elements constituting the population of that vast mainland and particularly from among Indians and Eskimos about whose future the Master wrote in such glowing terms. In the glorious freedom which enables you to proclaim, to teach and confirm, to educate and deepen yourselves and others in the verities of the Faith, you have precious opportunities of service denied to many of your fellow believers elsewhere. If your blessed communities are to lead the world spiritually, as the Master envisaged, then the Faith must strike deeper roots in your hearts, the spirit of its teachings must be exemplified in ever greater measure in your lives, and God’s Holy Cause must be taught and proclaimed with ever greater intensity. In His immortal Tablets addressed to the Bahá’ís of North America ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures each one of you that “whosoever arises in this day to diffuse the divine fragrances, the cohorts of the Kingdom of God shall confirm him ...”

You are met in this Conference to review the progress of the Seven Year Plan, to be confirmed, galvanized and sent into action. It is not enough for the North American believers to stand at the forefront of the Bahá’í world; the scope of their exertions must be steadily widened. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The range of your future achievements still remains undisclosed. I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements.” “Exert yourselves; your mission is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a centre from which waves of spiritual power will emanate ...” The valiant countries of North America should in the second half of the Seven Year Plan ensure that an ever-swelling number of pioneers and traveling teachers will arise and travel to and settle in countries which need their support, however inhospitable the local conditions may be, ceaselessly endeavoring to contribute to the expansion of the teaching work and the strengthening of the foundations of the communities they are called upon to assist. They should, moreover, continue their defence of the downtrodden, open their doors to their Bahá’í brethren who are seeking refuge in their lands, provide technological expertise to communities which need it, and supply an uninterrupted flow of resources to support the ever-increasing international projects of the Faith.

In their respective homefronts the Bahá’ís of North America should intensify the drive to attract the masses to God’s Holy Cause, to provide the means for their integration into the work of the Faith, and should become standard-bearers of an embryonic Bahá’í society which is destined to gradually emerge under the influence of the integrating and civilizing forces emanating from the Source of God’s Revelation. Such noble objectives cannot be fully achieved unless and until local communities become those collective centers of

unity ordained in our Writings, and every individual earnestly strives to support the structure and ensure the stability of the Administrative Edifice of the Faith.

How fitting that this Conference, and the one held for Bahá'í children on a scale unprecedented in North America, should commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, whose love for the North American believers and whose admiration for their heroism were so deep and so sustained and whose natural fondness for children was so characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh. May each of you emulate her unswerving devotion and loyalty to the Covenant of God and her perseverance in the path of His love. We shall mark the first day of your Conference, together with the one being held concurrently in Canberra, with prayers at the Holy Shrines that all may "be assisted in ... service and, like unto brilliant stars, shine in these regions with the light of ... guidance."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 February 1983

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN EVERY LAND

WE BOW OUR HEADS IN INFINITE GRATITUDE TO THE BLESSED BEAUTY FOR HIS ALL-  
EMBRACING CONFIRMATIONS ENABLING HOUSE JUSTICE OCCUPY ITS NEWLY CONSTRUCTED  
PERMANENT SEAT. THIS AUSPICIOUS EVENT SIGNALIZES ANOTHER PHASE IN PROCESS  
FULFILLMENT SAILING GOD'S ARK ON MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD AS ANTICIPATED IN TABLET  
CARMEL, WONDROUS CHARTER WORLD SPIRITUAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CENTERS FAITH  
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

THIS HIGH POINT HISTORY STRUGGLING FAITH NOW EMERGING FROM OBSCURITY, THIS CRUCIAL HOUR  
SUFFUSED WITH UNTOLD POTENCIES GENERATED BY SOUL-STIRRING SACRIFICES BELOVED  
BRETHREN IRAN, MARKED BY VISIT MEMBERS HOUSE JUSTICE TWIN HOLY SHRINES AND FIRST  
GATHERING COUNCIL CHAMBER TOGETHER WITH HANDS CAUSE AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM  
'ALÍ-AKBAR FURÚTAN AND COUNSELOR MEMBERS INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER TO OFFER  
PRAYERS HUMBLE THANKSGIVING. LET ALL REJOICE. LET PRAISES ANCIENT BEAUTY RESOUND. MAY  
UNRELENTING EFFORTS FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HASTEN ADVENT THAT DAY WHEN WONDROUS  
POTENTIALITIES ENSHRINED IN TABLET CARMEL WILL BE FULLY REVEALED AND WHEN FROM GOD'S  
HOLY MOUNTAIN, AS ENVISAGED BELOVED GUARDIAN, WILL STREAM FORTH RIVERS OF LAWS AND  
ORDINANCES WITH ALL-CONQUERING POWER AND MAJESTY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1983

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 worldwide, 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 Tákur, 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 worldwide 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 fulfillment 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 worldwide 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



19 May 1983

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

Dearly loved Friends,

For ten years the International Teaching Centre has rendered invaluable services at the World Center of the Faith, and it is with great joy that we now announce a number of major steps in the evolution of this vital institution of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Since the tragic death of Mr. Paul Haney there have been only two Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land. We have therefore decided to call upon Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá and Mr. Collis Featherstone to participate in the discharge of the special duties of the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land when the occasion requires, as for example, in dealing with matters of Covenant-breaking. They will be able to perform these functions either by correspondence or by periodic sojourns at the World Center.

We have decided to raise the number of resident members of the International Teaching Centre to nine. For reasons of health Mrs. Florence Mayberry is leaving the World Center, bringing to an end her highly valued services on this institution. Four new Counselor members have therefore been appointed: Dr. Magdalene Carney, Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí, Dr. Peter Khan and Mrs. Isobel Sabri, whom we now call upon to transfer their residences to the Holy Land, where they will join the Hands of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánúm and 'Alí-Akbar Furútan and Counselors Anneliese Bopp, Hooper Dunbar and 'Azíz Yazdí.

We have further decided, as foreshadowed in previous announcements, to institute a five-year term for the Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre. Each term will start on 23 May immediately following the International Bahá'í Convention, and the current term will end on 23 May 1988. Should circumstances prevent The Universal House of Justice from making new appointments at the end of any five-year term, the Counselors will remain in office until such time as new appointments can be made.

With the rapid growth of the Faith, its emergence from obscurity, and the diversification of the activities that the believers in many lands must undertake in such fields as education, rural development, radio and public relations—matters which must increasingly occupy the attention of The Universal House of Justice—we have decided that the time is ripe to devolve increased responsibility upon the International Teaching Centre in the fields of protection and propagation of the Faith. The duties of the International Teaching Centre, including those announced previously and those now being assigned to it, are as follows:



- To assume full responsibility for coordinating, stimulating and directing the Continental Boards of Counselors, acting also as liaison between them and The Universal House of Justice.
- To be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and, from this knowledge, to make reports and recommendations to The Universal House of Justice and give advice to the Continental Boards of Counselors.
- To watch over the security and ensure the protection of the Faith of God.
- To be alert to possibilities for the extension of the teaching work and the development of economic and social life both within and without the Bahá'í community, and to draw the attention of The Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counselors to such possibilities, making recommendations for action.
- To determine and anticipate needs for literature, pioneers and traveling teachers and to work out teaching plans, both regional and global, for the approval of The Universal House of Justice.
- To direct the work of the Continental Pioneer Committees.
- To administer the expenditure of the International Deputization Fund.
- To administer an annual budget that will be provided from the Bahá'í International Fund, allocating therefrom to the Continental Boards of Counselors monies for special teaching projects and literature subvention, and, when necessary, contributions to the Continental Funds.
- The transfer of functions and responsibilities in implementation of the above decisions will be made gradually as the new members are able to settle in the Holy Land. National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Pioneer Committees will be notified, as necessary, of any changes in procedure that will be required; in the meantime they should continue to operate as before.

In the near future the International Teaching Centre will be moving into its new offices near the House of the Master, in the building which served for several decades as the Western Pilgrim House, later as the seat of the International Bahá'í Council and, for the past twenty years as that of The Universal House of Justice. Now, most befittingly, it will serve as the office of the International Teaching Centre until the permanent building for that mighty institution can be raised on Mount Carmel in close proximity to The Universal House of Justice.

It is our ardent prayer that the decisions now taken will be blessed by Bahá'u'lláh and will enable the World Center of the Faith to coordinate and direct with ever greater effectiveness the self-sacrificing and

assiduous labors of the friends of God in every part of the world during the challenging years which lie before us.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

19 June 1983

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

FOLLOWING OUTRAGEOUS EXECUTION SIX BAHÁ'ÍS IN SHIRAZ ON 16 JUNE, FURTHER HIDEOUS CRIME HAS BEEN PERPETRATED BY AUTHORITIES THAT CITY BY HANGING TEN INNOCENT WOMEN NIGHT OF 18 JUNE. THEY ARE:

MRS. NUŞRAT YALDÁ'Í, 54 YEARS OLD, MOTHER OF BAHRÁM, HANGED 16 JUNE  
MRS. 'IZZAT JÁNAMÍ ISHRÁQÍ, 50 YEARS OLD, WIFE OF 'INÁYATU'LLÁH, HANGED 16 JUNE  
MISS RU'YÁ ISHRÁQÍ, IN EARLY 20'S, DAUGHTER OF ABOVE MRS. ṬÁHIRIH SÍYÁVUŞHÍ, 32 YEARS OLD, WIFE OF JAMSHÍD, HANGED 16 JUNE  
MISS MUNÁ MAḤMÚDNIZHÁD, 18 YEARS OLD, DAUGHTER OF YADU'LLÁH, EXECUTED 12 MARCH  
MISS ZARRÍN MUQÍMÍ-ABYÁNIH, UNDER 25 YEARS OLD  
MISS SHAHÍN (SHÍRÍN) DÁLVAND, EARLY 20'S  
MISS AKHTAR THÁBIT, 19 YEARS OLD  
MISS SÍMÍN ŞÁBIRÍ, IN EARLY 20'S  
MISS MAHSHÍD NÍRÚMAND, 18 YEARS OLD

THE EXECUTION OF THESE GUILTLESS WOMEN IN THE NAME OF RELIGION MUST SHOCK CONSCIENCE HUMANITY. THEY WERE ARRESTED FOR ACTIVITIES IN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY INCLUDING EDUCATION OF YOUTH.

FOLLOWING LONG INTERROGATION IN PRISON THEY WERE WARNED THEY WOULD BE SUBJECTED TO FOUR SESSIONS PRESSURING THEM RECENT THEIR FAITH ACCEPT ISLAM AND IF BY FOURTH TIME THEY HAD NOT SIGNED PREPARED STATEMENT RECENTING FAITH THEY WOULD BE KILLED. ALL PREFERRED DIE RATHER THAN DENY THEIR FAITH.

FEW HOURS PRIOR EXECUTION WOMEN MET WITH FAMILIES, NONE OF WHOM KNEW IMPENDING EXECUTION. NEWS THIS DASTARDLY CRIME NOT PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED OR FORMALLY GIVEN TO FAMILIES. AUTHORITIES REFUSED ALLOW FAMILIES RECEIVE BODIES FOR BURIAL OR EVEN TO SEE THEM.

IT SHOULD BE RECALLED THAT BETWEEN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 1982 OVER 80 BAHÁ'ÍS WERE ARRESTED IN SHIRAZ. AUTHORITIES LATER REVEALED THAT 22 PERSONS AMONG THE 80 WERE CONDEMNED TO DEATH IF WOULD NOT RECENT. NAMES OF THESE 22 HOWEVER WERE NEVER REVEALED, INTENSIFYING PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AMONG BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS.

IN DEFIANCE APPEALS WORLD LEADERS AND WORLD PUBLIC OPINION, 21 OF THESE BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE  
THUS FAR BEEN EXECUTED, CASTING SHADOW ON FATE REMAINING BELIEVERS LANGUISHING IN  
PRISON....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

23 June 1983

To Bahá'í Youth Throughout the World

RECENT MARTYRDOMS COURAGEOUS STEADFAST YOUTH IN SHIRAZ, SCENE INAUGURATION MISSION MARTYR-PROPHET, REMINISCENT ACTS VALOR YOUTHFUL IMMORTALS HEROIC AGE. CONFIDENT BAHÁ'Í YOUTH THIS GENERATION WILL NOT ALLOW THIS FRESH BLOOD SHED ON VERY SOIL WHERE FIRST WAVE PERSECUTION FAITH TOOK PLACE REMAIN UNVINDICATED OR THIS SUBLIME SACRIFICE UNAVAILING. AT THIS HOUR OF AFFLICTION AND GRIEF, AND AS WE APPROACH ANNIVERSARY MARTYRDOM BLESSED BÁB CALL ON BAHÁ'Í YOUTH TO REDEDICATE THEMSELVES TO URGENT NEEDS CAUSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. LET THEM RECALL BLESSINGS HE PROMISED THOSE WHO IN PRIME OF YOUTH WILL ARISE TO ADORN THEIR HEARTS WITH HIS LOVE AND REMAIN STEADFAST AND FIRM. LET THEM CALL TO MIND EXPECTATIONS MASTER FOR EACH TO BE A FEARLESS LION, A MUSK-LADEN BREEZE WAFTING OVER MEADS VIRTUE. LET THEM MEDITATE OVER UNIQUE QUALITIES YOUTH SO GRAPHICALLY MENTIONED IN WRITINGS GUARDIAN WHO PRAISED THEIR ENTERPRISING AND ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT, THEIR VIGOR, THEIR ALERTNESS, OPTIMISM AND EAGERNESS, AND THEIR DIVINELY APPOINTED, HOLY AND ENTHRALLING TASKS. WE FERVENTLY PRAY AT SACRED THRESHOLD THAT ARMY OF SPIRITUALLY AWAKENED AND DETERMINED YOUTH MAY IMMEDIATELY ARISE RESPONSE NEEDS PRESENT HOUR DEVOTE IN EVER GREATER MEASURE THEIR VALUED ENERGIES TO PROMOTE, BOTH ON HOMEFRONTS AND IN FOREIGN FIELDS, CAUSE THEIR ALL-WATCHFUL AND EXPECTANT LORD. MAY THEY MANIFEST SAME SPIRIT SO RECENTLY EVINCED THEIR MARTYR BRETHREN CRADLE FAITH, SCALE SUCH HEIGHTS OF ENDEAVOR AS TO BECOME PRIDE THEIR PEERS CONSOLATION HEARTS PERSIAN BELIEVERS, AND DEMONSTRATE THAT THE FLAME HIS OMNIPOTENT HAND HAS KINDLED BURNS EVER BRIGHT AND THAT ITS LIFE-IMPARTING WARMTH AND RADIANCE SHALL SOON ENVELOP PERMEATE WHOLE EARTH.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

4 July 1983

To the European Youth Conference in Innsbruck

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With high hopes we greet the representatives of the Bahá'í youth of Europe gathered in conference in Innsbruck. This generation of Bahá'í youth enjoys a unique distinction. You will live your lives in a period when the forces of history are moving to a climax, when mankind will see the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and during which the Cause of God will play an increasingly prominent role in the reconstruction of human society. It is you who will be called upon in the years to come to stand at the helm of the Cause in face of conditions and developments which can, as yet, scarcely be imagined.

European Bahá'í youth in particular face tremendous and challenging tasks in the immediate future. Can one doubt that the manner in which the governments of the European nations have rallied to the defense of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran will draw down blessings from on high upon this continent? And who among the people of Europe are more likely to be kindled by the challenge and hope of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh than the youth? Now is an opportunity to awaken the interest, set afire the hearts and enlist the active support of young people of every nation, class and creed in that continent. The key to success in this endeavor is, firstly, to deepen your understanding of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways that they will understand and welcome; secondly, to strive to model your behavior in every way after the high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, forbearance, purity and spirituality set forth in the Teachings; and, above all, to live in continual awareness of the presence and all-conquering power of Bahá'u'lláh, which will enable you to overcome every temptation and surmount every obstacle.

A vibrant band of Bahá'í youth on the European continent, committed to the promotion of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and the upholding of His laws and principles, determined to work in harmony and unity with their fellow believers of all ages and classes, can revolutionize the progress of the Cause. With a rapid increase in the size of the Bahá'í communities in Europe, the believers of that continent, the cradle of Western civilization, will be the better able to serve as a fountainhead of pioneers, traveling teachers and financial assistance to the Bahá'í communities of the Third World.

When deciding what course of training to follow, youth can consider acquiring those skills and professions that will be of benefit in education, rural development, agriculture, economics, technology, health, radio and in many other areas of endeavor that are so urgently needed in the developing countries of the world. You can also devote time in the midst of your studies, or other activities, to travel teaching or service projects in the Third World.

A particular challenge to the Bahá'í youth of Europe is the vast eastern half of the continent that is as yet scarcely touched by the light of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It is not easy to settle in those lands, but with ingenuity, determination and reliance upon the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh it is certainly possible both to settle and to persevere in service in goals which demand a spirit of self-sacrifice, detachment and purity of heart worthy of those who would emulate the shining example set by the martyrs in Iran, so many of whom are youth, who have given their lives rather than breathe one word that would be a betrayal of the trust of God placed upon them.

With love and utmost longing we call upon you to immerse yourselves in the divine Teachings, champion the Cause of God and His law, and arise for the quickening of mankind.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

1 September 1983

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Norway

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On several occasions there has been correspondence between your Assembly and The Universal House of Justice on meditation and kindred subjects. The House of Justice is aware that such matters have been a cause of differences of opinion among the Norwegian Bahá'ís. It has now come to the attention of the House of Justice that there was a session of group meditation of a particular kind at your summer school under the aegis of the National Teaching Committee. We have, therefore, been instructed to send you the following comments which, it is hoped, will help to resolve this long-standing problem.

In its message to the Dublin Conference The Universal House of Justice called upon the Continental Board of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies of Europe to launch together "such a campaign of spiritualization of the Bahá'í community, allied with intensified personal teaching, as has never been witnessed in your continent." It realizes that the session at your Summer School referred to above may well have been intended as an aspect of this campaign, and it feels that it would be helpful to explain more fully what it intended by "spiritualization of the Bahá'í community."

Europe has suffered so appallingly in past centuries from persecutions and conflicts inspired by religious differences and fanaticism that there has been a revulsion against religion. Many Europeans have become skeptical, scornful of religious practices, and reluctant either to discuss religious subjects or to give credence to the power of faith. This turning away from religion has been powerfully reinforced by the growth of materialism, and has produced a combination of physical well-being and spiritual aridity that is having catastrophic results, socially and psychologically, on the population.

This intellectual and emotional atmosphere creates problems for the Bahá'í community in two ways. Its effect upon a large proportion of the non-Bahá'í population makes it difficult for Bahá'ís to convey the Message to others. Its effect upon the Bahá'ís is more subtle, but no less harmful; if not consciously combated it can lead the believers to neglect those spiritual exercises which are the very fountainhead of their spiritual strength and the nourishment of their souls.



Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

- The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
- The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
- Prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
- Striving every day to bring our behavior more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.
- Teaching the Cause of God.
- Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

These points, expressed in other words, have already been conveyed to the friends in Europe by the Counselors, but the House of Justice wishes to stress them, because they represent the path towards the attainment of true spirituality that has been laid down by the Manifestation of God for this age.

It is striking how private and personal the most fundamental spiritual exercises of prayer and meditation are in the Faith. Bahá'ís do, of course, have meetings for devotions, as in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár or at Nineteen Day Feasts, but the daily obligatory prayers are ordained to be said in the privacy of one's chamber, and meditation on the Teachings is, likewise, a private individual activity, not a form of group therapy. In His talks 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes prayer as "conversation with God," and concerning meditation He says that "while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed."

There are, of course, other things that one can do to increase one's spirituality. For example, Bahá'u'lláh has specified no procedures to be followed in meditation, and individual believers are free to do as they wish in this area, provided that they remain in harmony with the Teachings, but such activities are purely personal and should under no circumstances be confused with those actions which Bahá'u'lláh Himself considered to be of fundamental importance for our spiritual growth. Some believers may find that it is beneficial to them to follow a particular method of meditation, and they may certainly do so, but such methods should not be taught at Bahá'í Summer Schools or be carried out during a session of the School because, while they

may appeal to some people, they may repel others. They have nothing to do with the Faith and should be kept quite separate so that inquirers will not be confused.

It would seem that there are in Norway many believers who draw particular benefit from meditation. The House of Justice suggests that for their private meditations they may wish to use the repetition of the Greatest Name, Alláh-u-Abhá, ninety-five times a day which, although not yet applied in the West, is among the Laws, Ordinances and Exhortations of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. (See p. 46 of the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.)

The House of Justice is confident that if the believers throughout Europe will conscientiously strive to increase their spirituality in the six ways outlined above, and become aware in their inmost beings that in all their services they are but vehicles for the confirming power of God, they will attract the hearts of their fellow citizens and penetrate the miasma of materialism that veils the sight of so many of their countrymen. Effort, activity, unity and constant reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh will assuredly overcome all obstacles.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

13 September 1983

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

SORELY TRIED COMMUNITY GREATEST NAME IRAN HAS IN RECENT DAYS SUSTAINED YET ANOTHER CRUEL BLOW OPENING NEW CHAPTER ITS TURBULENT HISTORY. ON 29 AUGUST IN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT THROUGH STATEMENT ISSUED ATTORNEY-GENERAL ANNOUNCED BAN BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION, RECITING USUAL FALSE ACCUSATIONS STATING EXISTENCE ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALLY CONSIDERED TO BE AGAINST LAWS CONSTITUTION COUNTRY. HOWEVER STATEMENT SAID BAHÁ'ÍS MAY PRACTICE BELIEFS AS PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS PROVIDED THEY DO NOT TEACH OR INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN FAITH, THEY DO NOT FORM ASSEMBLIES OR HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ADMINISTRATION. SERVING IN BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION NOW SPECIFIED AS CRIMINAL ACT. THIS LATEST ONSLAUGHT DEFENSELESS COMMUNITY CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES IMPLACABILITY FANATICAL ELEMENTS IN THEIR DRIVE SUPPRESS LIGHT GOD'S INFANT FAITH IN LAND ITS FIRST GLEAMING.

IN CONFORMITY PRINCIPLE LOYALTY OBEDIENCE GOVERNMENT NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY IRAN IMMEDIATELY TOOK ACTION DISSOLVE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION THROUGHOUT COUNTRY THUS UPHOLDING INTEGRITY COMMUNITY DESPITE HEAVY YOKE CRUELITIES BORNE BY ITS MEMBERS FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS. CONFIDENT THAT STEADFAST TRIED AND DEVOTED FRIENDS THAT LONG-AGITATED LAND WILL FACE NEW SITUATION WITH RADIANT FORTITUDE. AT SAME TIME BAHÁ'ÍS ELSEWHERE ENJOYING FREEDOM PRACTICE FAITH ACUTELY CHALLENGED TO VINDICATE BY THEIR RECONSECRATION TO IMMEDIATE SACRED TASKS UNABATED SUFFERING THEIR GRIEVOUSLY WRONGED IRANIAN BRETHREN. INDEED ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES URGED TAKE STEPS STRENGTHEN FOUNDATION BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS THEIR COUNTRIES AS TRIBUTE SACRIFICES COURAGEOUSLY ACCEPTED MEMBERS COMMUNITY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S NATIVE LAND.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

19 October 1983

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

You have already been informed of the disbanding of the National Spiritual Assembly and other Bahá'í institutions in Iran as a result of the new policy of the Iranian Government. The National Spiritual Assembly, before disbanding itself, decided to issue an open letter to the authorities and the public of their country explaining the action of their Government and pointing out the unjust attitudes and accusations of the Government against the Bahá'í administration in that land. Over two thousand of these letters were dispatched to important officials and other prominent people in Iran.

A copy of this letter has been received by The Universal House of Justice, and we have been instructed to enclose a translation for your information and possible use. Publication of the letter is permissible in whatever manner your National Spiritual Assembly deems fit.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**An Open Letter from  
the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran  
about the Banning of the Bahá'í Administration**

(12 Sháhrívar 1362)

[3 September 1983]

Recently the esteemed Public Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution of the country, in an interview that was published in the newspapers, declared that the continued functioning of the Bahá'í religious and spiritual administration is banned and that membership in it is considered to be a crime. This declaration has been made after certain unjustified accusations have been leveled against the Bahá'í community of Iran and after a number of its members—ostensibly for imaginary and fabricated crimes but in reality merely for the sake

of their beliefs—have been either executed, or arrested and imprisoned. The majority of those who have been imprisoned have not yet been brought to trial.

The Bahá'í community finds the conduct of the authorities and the judges bewildering and lamentable—as indeed would any fair-minded observer who is unblinded by malice. The authorities are the refuge of the people; the judges in pursuit of their work of examining and ascertaining the truth and facts in legal cases devote years of their lives to studying the law and, when uncertain of a legal point spend hours poring over copious tomes in order to cross a “t” and dot an “i.” Yet these very people consider themselves to be justified in brazenly bringing false accusations against a band of innocent people, without fear of the Day of Judgment, without even believing the calumnies they utter against their victims, and having exerted not the slightest effort to investigate to any degree the validity of the charges they are making. “Methinks they are not believers in the Day of Judgment.” (Háfiz)

The honorable Prosecutor has again introduced the baseless and fictitious story that Bahá'ís engage in espionage, but without producing so much as one document in support of the accusation, without presenting proof in any form, and without any explanation as to what is the mission in this country of this extraordinary number of “spies”: what sort of information do they obtain and from what sources? Whither do they relay it, and for what purpose? What kind of “spy” is an eighty-five-year-old man from Yazd who has never set foot outside his village? Why do these alleged spies not hide themselves, conceal their religious beliefs and exert every effort to penetrate, by every stratagem, the Government’s information centers and offices? Why has no Bahá'í “spy” been arrested anywhere else in the world? How could students, housewives, innocent young girls, and old men and women, like those blameless Bahá'ís who have recently been delivered to the gallows in Iran, or who have become targets for the darts of prejudice and enmity, be “spies”? How could the Bahá'í farmers of the villages of Afús, Chígán, Qal'ih Malik (near Isfahan), and those of the village of Núk in Bírjand, be “spies”? What Secret Intelligence documents have been found in their possession? What espionage equipment has come to hand? What “spying” activities were engaged in by the primary schoolchildren who have been expelled from their schools?

And how strange! The Public Prosecutor perhaps does not know, or does not care to know, that spying is an element of politics, while noninterference in politics is an established principle of the Bahá'í Faith. On the contrary, Bahá'ís love their country and never permit themselves to be traitors. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the successor of the Founder of the Bahá'í Cause, says: “Any abasement is bearable except betraying one’s own country, and any sin is forgivable other than dishonoring the government and inflicting harm upon the nation.”

All the other accusations made against the Bahá'ís by the honorable Public Prosecutor of the Revolution are similarly groundless. He brands the Bahá'í community with accusations of subversion and corruption. For example, on the basis of a manifestly forged interview, the falsity of which has been dealt with in a detailed statement, he accuses the Bahá'í community of hoarding, an act which its members would consider highly reprehensible. The Prosecutor alleges that the Bahá'í administration sanctioned the insensible act of hoarding, yet he subtly overlooks the fact that with the proceeds that might be realized from the sale of unusable automobile spare parts whose total value is some 70 million túmáns—the value of the stock of any medium-size store for spare parts—it would be impossible to overthrow a powerful government

whose daily expenditures amount to hundreds of millions of túmáns. If the Public Prosecutor chooses to label the Bahá'í administration as a network of espionage, let him at least consider it intelligent enough not to plan the overthrow of such a strong regime by hoarding a few spare parts! Yes, such allegations of corruption and subversion are similar to those hurled against us at the time of the Episcopalian case in Isfahan when this oppressed community was accused of collaboration with foreign agents as a result of which seven innocent Bahá'ís of Yazd were executed. Following this the falsity of the charges was made known and the Public Prosecutor announced the episode to be the outcome of a forgery.

Bahá'ís are accused of collecting contributions and transferring sums of money to foreign countries. How strange! If Muslims, in accordance with their sacred and respected spiritual beliefs, send millions of túmáns to Karbilá, Najaf and Jerusalem, or to other Muslim Holy Places outside Iran to be spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the Islamic Sacred Shrines, it is considered very praiseworthy; but if a Bahá'í—even during the time in which the transfer of foreign currency was allowed—sends a negligible amount for his international community to be used for the repair and maintenance of the Holy Places of his Faith, it is considered that he has committed an unforgivable sin and it is counted as proof that he has done so in order to strengthen other countries.

Accusations of this nature are many but all are easy to investigate. If just and impartial people and God-fearing judges will only do so, the falsity of these spurious accusations will be revealed in case after case. The Bahá'í community emphatically requests that such accusations be investigated openly in the presence of juries composed of judges and international observers so that, once and for all, the accusations may be discredited and their repetition prevented.

The basic principles and beliefs of the Bahá'ís have been repeatedly proclaimed and set forth in writing during the past five years. Apparently these communications, either by deliberate design or by mischance, have not received any attention, otherwise accusations such as those described above would not have been repeated by one of the highest and most responsible authorities. This in itself is a proof that the numerous communications referred to were not accorded the attention of the leaders; therefore, we mention them again.

The Bahá'í Faith confesses the unity of God and the justice of the divine Essence. It recognizes that Almighty God is an exalted, unknowable and concealed entity, sanctified from ascent and descent, from egress and regress, and from assuming a physical body. The Bahá'í Faith, which professes the existence of the invisible God, the One, the Single, the Eternal, the Peerless, bows before the loftiness of His Threshold, believes in all divine Manifestations, considers all the Prophets from Adam to the Seal of the Prophets as true divine Messengers Who are the Manifestations of Truth in the world of creation, accepts Their Books as having come from God, believes in the continuation of the divine outpourings, emphatically believes in reward and punishment and, uniquely among existing revealed religions outside Islam, accepts the Prophet Muḥammad as a true Prophet and the Qur'án as the Word of God.

The Bahá'í Faith embodies independent principles and laws. It has its own Holy Book. It prescribes pilgrimage and worship. A Bahá'í performs obligatory prayers and observes a fast. He gives, according to

his beliefs, tithes and contributions. He is required to be of upright conduct, to manifest a praiseworthy character, to love all mankind, to be of service to the world of humanity and to sacrifice his own interests for the good and well-being of his fellow kind. He is forbidden to commit unbecoming deeds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "A Bahá'í is known by the attributes manifested by him, not by his name; he is recognized by his character, not by his person."

Shoghi Rabbani, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, says: "... a person who is not adorned with the ornaments of virtue, sanctity, and morality, is not a true Bahá'í, even though he may call himself one and be known as such."

He also says: "... the friends have been required ... to be righteous, well-wishing, forbearing, sanctified, pure, detached from all else save God, severed from the trappings of this world and adorned with the mantle of a goodly character and godly attributes."

The teachings and laws of the Bahá'í religion testify to this truth. Fortunately, the books and writings which have been plundered in abundance from the homes of Bahá'ís and are available to the authorities, bear witness to the truth of these assertions. Bahá'ís, in keeping with their spiritual beliefs, stay clear of politics; they do not support or reject any party, group or nation; they do not champion or attack any ideology or any specific political philosophy; they shrink from and abhor political agitations. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause says, "The people of Bahá, under the jurisdiction of whatsoever state or government they may be residing, should conduct themselves with honesty and sincerity, trustworthiness and rectitude.... They are neither thirsty for prominence, nor acquisitive of power; they are neither adepts at dissimulation and hypocrisy, nor are they seekers after wealth and influence; they neither crave for the pomp and circumstance of high office, nor do they lust after the glory of titles and ranks. They are averse to affectation and ostentation, and shrink from the use of coercive force; they have closed their eyes to all but God, and set their hearts on the firm and incontrovertible promises of their Lord ... Oblivious to themselves, they have occupied their energies in working towards the good of society ... While vigilantly refusing to accept political posts, they should wholeheartedly welcome the chance to assume administrative positions; for the primary purpose of the people of Bahá is to advance the interests and promote the welfare of the nation ... Such is the method of the Bahá'ís; such is the conduct of all spiritually illuminated souls; and aught else is manifest error."

Also, Bahá'ís, in accordance with their exalted teachings, are duty bound to be obedient to their government. Elucidating this subject, Shoghi Rabbani says: "The people of Bahá are required to obey their respective governments, and to demonstrate their truthfulness and good will towards the authorities.... Bahá'ís, in every land and without any exception, should ... be obedient and bow to the clear instructions and the declared decrees issued by the authorities. They must faithfully carry out such directives."

Bahá'í administration has no aim except the good of all nations and it does not take any steps that are against the public good. Contrary to the conception the word "administration" may create in the mind because of the similarity in name, it does not resemble the current organizations of political parties; it does not interfere in political affairs; and it is the safeguard against the involvement of Bahá'ís in subversive

political activities. Its high ideals are “to improve the characters of men; to extend the scope of knowledge; to abolish ignorance and prejudice; to strengthen the foundations of true religion in all hearts; to encourage self-reliance and discourage false imitation; ... to uphold truthfulness, audacity, frankness, and courage; to promote craftsmanship and agriculture; ... to educate, on a compulsory basis, children of both sexes; to insist on integrity in business transactions; to lay stress on the observance of honesty and piety; ... to acquire mastery and skill in the modern sciences and arts; to promote the interests of the public; ... to obey outwardly and inwardly and with true loyalty the regulations enacted by state and government; ... to honor, to extol and to follow the example of those who have distinguished themselves in science and learning.” And again, “... to help the needy from every creed or sect, and to collaborate with the people of the country in all welfare services.”

In brief, whatever the clergy in other religions undertake individually and by virtue of their appointment to their positions, the Bahá'í administration performs collectively and through an elective process.

The statements made by the esteemed Public Prosecutor of the Revolution do not seem to have legal basis, because in order to circumscribe individuals and deprive them of the rights which have not been denied them by the Constitution, it is necessary to enact special legislation, provided that legislation is not contradictory to the Constitution. It was hoped that the recent years would have witnessed, on the one hand, the administration of divine justice—a principle promoted by the true religion of Islam and prescribed by all monotheistic religions—and, on the other, and coupled with an impartial investigation of the truths of the Bahá'í Faith, the abolition or at least mitigation of discriminations, restrictions and pressures suffered by Bahá'ís over the past 135 years. Alas, on the contrary, because of long-standing misunderstandings and prejudices, the difficulties increased immensely and the portals of calamity were thrown wide open in the faces of the long-suffering and sorely oppressed Bahá'ís of Iran who were, to an even greater degree, deprived of their birthrights through the systematic machinations of Government officials who are supposed to be the refuge of the public, and of some impostors in the garb of divines, who engaged in official or unofficial spreading of mischievous and harmful accusations and calumnies, and issued, in the name of religious and judicial authorities, unlawful decrees and verdicts.

Many are the pure and innocent lives that have been snuffed out; many the distinguished heads that have adorned the hangman's noose; and many the precious breasts that became the targets of firing squads. Vast amounts of money and great quantities of personal property have been plundered or confiscated. Many technical experts and learned people have been tortured and condemned to long-term imprisonment and are still languishing in dark dungeons, deprived of the opportunity of placing their expertise at the service of the Government and the nation. Numerous are the self-sacrificing employees of the Government who spent their lives in faithful service but who were dismissed from work and afflicted with poverty and need because of hatred and prejudice. Even the owners of private firms and institutions were prevented from engaging Bahá'ís. Many privately owned Bahá'í establishments have been confiscated. Many tradesmen have been denied the right to continue working by cancellation of their business licenses. Bahá'í youth have been denied access to education in many schools and in all universities and institutions of higher education. Bahá'í university students abroad are deprived of receiving money for their education, and



others who wish to pursue their studies outside Iran have been denied exit permits. Bahá'ís, including the very sick whose only hope for cure was to receive medical treatment in specialized medical centers in foreign lands, have been prevented from leaving the country. Bahá'í cemeteries have been confiscated and bodies rudely disinterred. Numerous have been the days when a body has remained unburied while the bereaved family pleaded to have a permit issued and a burial place assigned so that the body might be decently buried. As of today, thousands of Bahá'ís have been divested of their homes and forced to live as exiles. Many have been driven from their villages and dwelling places and are living as wanderers and stranded refugees in other parts of Iran with no other haven and refuge but the Court of the All-Merciful God and the loving-kindness of their friends and relatives.

It is a pity that the mass media, newspapers and magazines, either do not want or are not allowed to publish any news about the Bahá'í community of Iran or to elaborate upon what is happening. If they were free to do so and were unbiased in reporting the daily news, volumes would have been compiled describing the inhumane cruelty to and oppression of the innocent. For example, if they were allowed to do so, they would have written that in Shiraz, seven courageous men and ten valiant women—seven of whom were girls in the prime of their lives—audaciously rejected the suggestion of the religious judge that they recant their Faith or, at least, dissemble their belief, and preferred death to the concealment of their Faith. The women, after hours of waiting with dried lips, shrouded themselves in their chádurs, kissed the noose of their gallows, and with intense love offered up their souls for the One Who proffereth life. The observers of this cruel scene might well ask forgiveness for the murderers at Karbilá, since they, despite their countless atrocities, did not put women to the sword nor harass the sick and infirm. Alas, tongues are prevented from making utterance and pens are broken and the hidden cause of these brutalities is not made manifest to teach the world a lesson. The Public Prosecutor alleges that they were spies. Gracious God! Where in history can one point to a spy who readily surrendered his life in order to prove the truth of his belief?

Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this letter to recount the atrocities inflicted upon the guiltless Bahá'ís of Iran or to answer, one by one, the accusations leveled against them. But let us ask all just and fair-minded people only one question: If, according to the much publicized statements of the Public Prosecutor, Bahá'ís are not arrested and executed because of their belief, and are not even imprisoned on that account, how is it that, when a group of them are arrested and each is charged with the same “crime” of “spying,” if one of them recants his belief, he is immediately freed, a photograph of him and a description of his defection are victoriously featured in the newspapers, and respect and glory are heaped upon him? What kind of spying, subversion, illegal accumulation of goods, aggression or conspiracy or other “crime” can it be that is capable of being blotted out upon the recantation of one’s beliefs? Is this not a clear proof of the absurdity of the accusations?

In spite of all this, the Bahá'í community of Iran, whose principles have been described earlier in this statement, announces the suspension of the Bahá'í organizations throughout Iran in order to establish its good intentions and in conformity with its basic tenets concerning complete obedience to the instructions of the Government. Henceforth, until the time when, God willing, the misunderstandings are eliminated and the realities are at last made manifest to the authorities, the National Assembly and all Local Spiritual

Assemblies and their Committees are disbanded, and no one may any longer be designated a member of the Bahá'í Administration.

The Bahá'í community of Iran hopes that this step will be considered a sign of its complete obedience to the Government in power. It further hopes that the authorities—including the esteemed Public Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution who says that there is no opposition to and no enmity towards individual Bahá'ís, who has acknowledged the existence of a large Bahá'í community and has, in his interview, guaranteed its members the right to live and be free in their acts of worship—will reciprocate by proving their good intentions and the truth of their assurances by issuing orders that pledge, henceforth:

- To bring to an end the persecutions, arrests, torture and imprisonment of Bahá'ís for imaginary crimes and on baseless pretexts, because God knows—and so do the authorities—that the only “crime” of which these innocent ones are guilty is that of their beliefs, and not the unsubstantiated accusations brought against them;
- To guarantee the safety of their lives, their personal property and belongings, and their honor;
- To accord them freedom to choose their residence and occupation and the right of association based on the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic;
- To restore all the rights which have been taken away from them in accordance with the groundless assertions of the Public Prosecutor of the country;
- To restore to Bahá'í employees the rights denied them by returning them to their jobs and by paying them their due wages;
- To release from prison all innocent prisoners;
- To lift the restrictions imposed on the properties of those Bahá'ís who, in their own country, have been deprived of their belongings;
- To permit Bahá'í students who wish to continue their studies abroad to benefit from the same facilities that are provided to others;
- To permit those Bahá'í youth who have been prevented from continuing their studies in the country to resume their education;
- To permit those Bahá'í students stranded abroad who have been deprived of foreign exchange facilities to receive their allowances as other Iranian students do;

- To restore Bahá'í cemeteries and to permit Bahá'ís to bury their dead in accordance with Bahá'í burial ceremonies;
- To guarantee the freedom of Bahá'ís to perform their religious rites; to conduct funerals and burials including the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead; to solemnize Bahá'í marriages and divorces, and to carry out all acts of worship and laws and ordinances affecting personal status; because although Bahá'ís are entirely obedient and subordinate to the Government in the administration of the affairs which are in the jurisdiction of Bahá'í organizations, in matters of conscience and belief, and in accordance with their spiritual principles, they prefer martyrdom to recantation or the abandoning of the divine ordinances prescribed by their Faith;
- To desist henceforth from arresting and imprisoning anyone because of his previous membership in Bahá'í organizations.

Finally, although the order issued by the Public Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution was unjust and unfair, we have accepted it. We beseech God to remove the dross of prejudice from the hearts of the authorities so that, aided and enlightened by His confirmations, they will be inspired to recognize the true nature of the affairs of the Bahá'í community and come to the unalterable conviction that the infliction of atrocities and cruelties upon a pious band of wronged ones, and the shedding of their pure blood, will stain the good name and injure the prestige of any nation or government, for what will, in truth, endure are the records of good deeds, and of acts of justice and fairness, and the names of the doers of good. These will history preserve in its bosom for posterity.

Respectfully,

(signed) The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran

20 October 1983

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The soul-stirring events in Bahá'u'lláh's native land and the concomitant advance into the theater of world affairs of the agencies of His Administrative Order have combined to bring into focus new possibilities in the evolution of the Bahá'í world community. Our Riqvân message this year captured these implications in its reference to the opening before us of a wider horizon in whose light can dimly be discerned new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must soon embark. These portend our greater involvement in the development of the social and economic life of peoples.

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the "progress of the world" and the "development of nations" as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith. The beloved Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society. Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unfailing encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause.

Now, after all the years of constant teaching activity, the Community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits; particularly is action compelled by the expansion of the Faith in Third World countries where the vast majority of its adherents reside. The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honor so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

It is indeed propitious that systematic attention be given to this vital sphere of Bahá'í endeavor. We are happy, therefore, to announce the establishment at the World Center of the Office of Social and Economic Development, which is to assist The Universal House of Justice to promote and coordinate the activities of the friends throughout the world in this new field.

The International Teaching Centre and, through it, the Continental Boards of Counselors are poised for the special responsibilities which devolve upon them to be alert to possibilities for extending the development of social and economic life both within and outside the Bahá'í Community, and to advise and encourage the Assemblies and friends in their strivings.

We call now upon National Spiritual Assemblies to consider the implications of this emerging trend for their respective communities, and to take well-conceived measures to involve the thought and actions of Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals in the devising and implementing of plans within the constraints of existing circumstances and available resources. Progress in the development field will largely depend on natural stirrings at the grass roots, and it should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top. The major task of National Assemblies, therefore, is to increase the local communities' awareness of needs and possibilities, and to guide and coordinate the efforts resulting from such awareness. Already in many areas the friends are witnessing the confirmations of their initiatives in such pursuits as the founding of tutorial and other schools, the promotion of literacy, the launching of rural development programs, the inception of educational radio stations, and the operation of agricultural and medical projects. As they enlarge the scope of their endeavors other modes of development will undoubtedly emerge.

This challenge evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Bahá'í world. Different communities will, of course, perceive different approaches and different solutions to similar needs. Some can offer assistance abroad, while, at the outset, others must of necessity receive assistance; but all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life. The key to success is unity in spirit and in action.

We go forward confident that the wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels. Our engagement in the technical aspects of development should, however, not be allowed to supplant the essentials of teaching, which remains the primary duty of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh. Rather should our increased activities in the development field be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action. For, if expansion of the teaching work does not continue, there can be no hope of success for this enlarged dimension of the consolidation process.

Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and

skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá'í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man.

May all derive enduring inspiration from the following statement written in 1933 by the hand of our beloved Guardian:

The problems which confront the believers at the present time, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service and for the application of Bahá'í principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them. May the Almighty aid them to fulfill their highest hopes ...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

7 November 1983

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Recent events in Iran following the banning of the Bahá'í administration indicate, unfortunately, the continuation of intense pressures against the defenseless Bahá'í community in that country. Many of these pressures are being exerted by the authorities in the hope that the Bahá'ís will recant their faith and trade their love of Bahá'u'lláh for the comfort and security which the authorities offer to them in exchange.

With great sadness The Universal House of Justice announces that many friends in prison are being tortured when they refuse to submit to the will of the authorities to deny their love for Bahá'u'lláh. In addition, while it is true that no Bahá'ís have been executed since the statement calling for the disbanding of the administration of the Faith was made by the Attorney-General on 29 August, it has been reported that on 19 September a Bahá'í farmer in the town of Khuy, Mr. Akbar Ḥaqíqí, died as a result of a beating by a mob instigated by the clergy. Moreover, at least 140 Bahá'ís have been arrested in all parts of the country following the Attorney-General's statement, 50 of whom were detained on 30 October in the Caspian Sea area. Although a number of the friends have been released, the total number of Bahá'ís still imprisoned in Iran, according to our records, stands at over 450.

Three believers who were advanced in age have died in prison and thus have joined the ranks of those who have laid down their lives in service to the Cause. They are:

Mr. Ḥusayn Nayyirí-Iṣfahání, 64 years old—imprisoned in Iṣfahán and died just as he was going into court for his trial on 29 November 1982.

Mr. Aḥmad-'Alí Thábit-Sarvistání, 67 years old—died in prison in Shiraz on 30 June 1983.

Mr. Muḥammad Ishráqí, 81 years old, an Auxiliary Board member—died in prison in Tehran on 31 August 1983.

Word has also recently been received that in the city of Dizfúl, a Bahá'í woman, Mrs. Írán Raḥímpúr (Khurmá'í), was executed on 12 May 1982 after giving birth to her child. The baby was taken away by the Muslims and his fate is unknown.

One of the most obvious examples of persecution and proof of the evil intention of the Iranian authorities to uproot the Faith in that land is the destruction and desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries. Recently there was an official advertisement in the newspapers in Iran indicating that the tombstones in the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran were being put up for sale. Since all markers on the graves are apparently being eliminated, it is possible that no trace of the Bahá'í cemetery will remain in future....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



Department of the Secretariat

7 December 1983

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In recent months The Universal House of Justice has received comments from individual American believers expressing their distress over the continuing persecution of their beloved co-workers in Iran, and proposing such ways of registering their protest as public demonstrations and the wearing of armbands and ribbons. Consideration of these comments has prompted the instruction of the House of Justice that we write you thus.

It is indeed difficult, given the heartbreaking disabilities imposed upon the Iranian Bahá'í Community and the seeming impotence of the American Community directly to effect a positive change, for the friends to be at ease. But that the situation in Iran, grave as it is, should lead to feelings of depression and alienation on the part of the American believers, as has been reported, or that it should be allowed to hamper their success in teaching on the home front, suggests the need for a proper perspective. You will sense in the comments and appeals of the beloved Guardian addressed to the American Community during 1955–56 a striking resemblance between the reactions and attitudes of the friends towards the crisis then and now. A rereading of his letter of 20 August 1955 describing the situation then and the opportunities it created for the proclamation of the Faith, and his cables of 5 January, 2 February and 22 June 1956 (*Citadel of Faith*, pages 133–42) urging action is most instructive. The American Community has displayed in the past a tendency towards periodic immobility, a condition the Guardian commented upon from time to time and that was the main concern of his last letter to the America dated 21 September 1957 (*Citadel of Faith*, pages 151–58). While the House of Justice does not now have the impression that the American believers as a whole are depressed, it feels it might be helpful to all concerned to make the following comments on the basis of that assumption, as conveyed in the correspondence received.

The American Bahá'í Community has for many years been in the forefront of defending the weak and oppressed. Its distinction in this respect won the repeated praise of the beloved Guardian, as, for example, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, his celebrated letter of 25 December 1938, affirms. Against an enumeration of afflictions that at that time threatened to force the majority of the existing Bahá'í communities into the shadows of retreat, he described the Bahá'í Community in North America as the “one chief remaining citadel, the mighty arm which still raises aloft the standard of an unconquerable Faith.” The many instances during the subsequent years in which that Community came to the aid of other defenseless communities

are a testimony to the effectiveness of the American responses in times of need and trouble. But the situation in the world and in the Bahá'í community has changed. Consequently, the accustomed reactions to American interventions have also changed. While this change does not nullify the preeminent role destined for America in the eventual efflorescence of Bahá'u'lláh's system in the world, it does require the American believers to obtain a deeper understanding of their situation in relation to the changed circumstances.

The friends' response to the Iranian situation should neither be solely pragmatic nor solely spiritual, but a combination of both; moreover, it must not only meet the test of the immediate crisis, it must also match the challenge of the historic moment. In both these respects a fair appraisal of the results thus far should steel their resolve, not induce depression. Even though when viewed from the truculent reactions of the powers in Iran, the petitions and protests of the American Community in particular, the Bahá'í communities in general, appear to have been ineffective in stemming the persecutions of our brethren, there is strong reason to believe that had the Bahá'ís around the world not taken these actions, the plight of the Iranian friends would be far more tragic. And while there is a vast array of direct action that could be, or could have been, contemplated, not every proposed action is fitting or timely. Actions perceived to be appropriate within the framework of American society can be counterproductive when viewed in the broader framework of a world community. The Bahá'í world, in its complex diversity, has been guided to act according to the assessment by the House of Justice of the immediate circumstances and the resource at hand, and in consideration of the opinions and judgments of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, which until its recent disbanding, functioned with heroic verve in defending the rights of those under its charge. Since the Bahá'í Community must operate as a cohesive entity, it is not conducive to its success for any single unit of that world-embracing organism to go off at a tangent in its reactions to the situation, as well-intentioned as that unit might be.

The House of Justice suggests that the American friends look at the great contrast between the relatively low profile the Faith kept before the crisis and the obvious prominence it has achieved since then; that they consider the remarkable impression that the national Bahá'í communities throughout the world have made upon their national governments and international organizations; that they contemplate the extraordinary breakthroughs for the Faith in the media of the world compared to the media's reticence toward the Cause a few years ago; and, finally, that they think of the implications of all these new advantages for the teaching work and determine dispassionately whether, in fact, the opportunities for the progress of the Faith are greater or lesser than before.

There is no gainsaying the insight set forth in the Teachings that opposition to the Faith creates opportunities for its progress. By their radiant submission to this insight, the Iranian Bahá'ís have surely demonstrated their conviction as to its potency. Motivated by their understanding of it, a number of Bahá'í communities in different parts of the world have engaged in activities that are producing concrete results in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. For the American believers to give true expression to the anguish they feel over the persecution of their brethren, they too must capture the value of this insight and act upon it. The vision, the admonitions, the encouragement which *The Advent of Divine Justice* conveyed so many years ago, and which the Guardian elaborated in so many of his subsequent messages, are as

appropriate, perhaps even more so, to the current situation as when they were first given. The responses he attempted long ago to evoke are no less desirable and necessary now; a deeper spiritual awareness, a deeper spiritual maturity are called for if the American community must pursue successfully its destined course. It should not be forgotten that the beloved Master promised, as the Guardian recalled in his early letters to America, to send intellectual, rather than physical, tests to the friends there in order to purify and better prepare them for their divinely appointed destiny. Nor should the prerequisites of success the Guardian outlined for the American Bahá'í Community be overlooked. It is in the framework of these prerequisites that the success or failure of the American Community must ultimately be measured, not from the standpoint of any frustration in effecting a desired change in the Iranian situation, which, despite its admitted distress for the community, has done more to proclaim the Cause abroad than any other experience in this century.

In a society whose people are as protestant and demonstrative as the Americans, such public displays and symbolic gestures as street demonstrations and the wearing of armbands and ribbons may have a certain appeal to public attention and may even prove to be effective in the proper context and under the proper circumstances. But the evocative power of such activities is difficult to sustain over a long period. Particularly is this so in your country where the public demonstrations of a myriad groups constantly compete for attention. The House of Justice feels that while these ephemeral activities might relieve the immediate anxieties of some of the friends, they would have no measurable effect on the course of events in Iran. Our human resources are so limited, they must be devoted to the most effective means of responding to the situation. Of infinitely more value are actions that reflect the spiritual profundity underlying these persecutions and that match the dignity, radiance and optimism for the Faith of the valorous victims, who, as their published testimonies show, are quite clear about the reasons for their suffering and dying. Moreover, in the long view, it would not serve the best interests of the Faith for its members, at the very time of their emergence from obscurity, to impress themselves upon the consciousness of the public as a community identified with such symbols as armbands and ribbons.

An important point to bear in mind is that our activities in defense of the Iranian believers must be supported by those toward the accomplishment of our stated goals. Preoccupation with the Iranian crisis, at the expense of neglecting the Seven Year Plan, would divert the Bahá'í world community from achieving the very success necessary to the strengthening of the Faith and the confounding of its enemies. Such a neglect would be unworthy of the sufferings of the Iranian friends. Indeed, the ideal being constantly pursued is to defend them vigorously, while, at the same time, exploiting the opportunities created by their sacrifices to promote the Cause of God. The unprecedented publicity, the unremitting appeals to governments and international bodies, the increased contacts with leaders of thought and, above all, the redoubling of teaching activities and the deeper consolidation of the Bahá'í Community, as called for by the House of Justice, are ultimately the best means of defending and securing the relief of the beleaguered Iranian Community; besides, by these means will the world community of Bahá'ís be better prepared to meet the inevitable opposition yet to come elsewhere.

It is the fervent prayer of the House of Justice that the American friends will be sustained by the same unconquerable spirit that fortifies the resolute faith of their brothers and sisters in Iran, that they will be refreshed from the same fountain of hope inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance to the loved ones of God in that land, whom He exhorts "to patience, to acquiescence, and to tranquillity," and addresses in these consoling words:

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own.

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

13 December 1983

To the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Alaska, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Hawaiian Islands, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has been consulting upon aspects of youth service in pioneering throughout the Bahá'í world, and has requested that we convey its views on service in other lands undertaken by Bahá'í youth with voluntary nonsectarian organizations.

In the past, the policy adopted by some National Assemblies was to discourage young Bahá'ís from enrolling to serve in activities sponsored by non-Bahá'í voluntary organizations, as the Assemblies were under the impression that these young people would not be able to engage in direct teaching, nor participate, for the most part, in Bahá'í activities while serving abroad in such programs. Perhaps in some instances the Bahá'ís involved were not sure how to function as members of the Bahá'í community in order to give each aspect of their lives its proper due.

In the light of experience, however, it is now clear that we should have no misgivings in encouraging young Bahá'ís to enroll in such voluntary service organization programs as the United Nations Volunteers, United States Peace Corps, Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) and similar Canadian agencies, the British Volunteer Program (BVP) of the United Kingdom, and other voluntary service organizations. Other countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian lands are understood to have similar service organizations which are compatible with Bahá'í development goals as now tentatively envisaged.

Some of the advantages of such service to the Faith are worth mentioning. Volunteers will receive thorough orientation and sometimes will be taught basic skills which will enable them to help the Bahá'í community in projects undertaken in developing countries. Wherever they serve, these volunteers should be able to participate in Bahá'í activities and contribute to the consolidation of the Bahá'í community. The freedom to teach is to a large extent dependent upon the local interpretation of the group leader, but even if volunteers do not engage in direct teaching, being known as Bahá'ís and showing the Bahá'í spirit and attitude towards work and service should attract favorable attention and may, in many instances, be instrumental in

attracting individuals to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. And finally, the period of overseas service often produces a taste for such service, and volunteers may well offer to directly promote the pioneer work either in the same country or in another developing country.

It is well known that a considerable number of Bahá'ís have already gone abroad to serve with these agencies and that others have espoused the Faith while serving in foreign lands with voluntary service organizations....

National Spiritual Assemblies which hold orientation courses for pioneers may benefit from including the subject of rural development in their program, and, as in the past, from inviting people who have served in voluntary service organizations to participate in the planning of orientation programs and in having them share their experiences as volunteer workers in developing countries.

The House of Justice expresses the hope that the information contained in this letter will dispel the misunderstandings that have in the past surrounded the question of participation of Bahá'í youth in projects sponsored by non-Bahá'í voluntary organizations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

3 January 1984

To the Bahá'í Youth of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The designation of 1985 by the United Nations as International Youth Year opens new vistas for the activities in which the young members of our community are engaged. The hope of the United Nations in thus focusing on youth is to encourage their conscious participation in the affairs of the world through their involvement in international development and such other undertakings and relationships as may aid the realization of their aspirations for a world without war.

These expectations reinforce the immediate, vast opportunities begging our attention. To visualize, however imperfectly, the challenges that engage us now, we have only to reflect, in the light of our sacred Writings, upon the confluence of favorable circumstances brought about by the accelerated unfolding of the Divine Plan over nearly five decades, by the untold potencies of the spiritual drama being played out in Iran, and by the creative energy stimulated by awareness of the approaching end of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.

How apt, indeed how exciting, that so portentous an occasion should be presented to you, the young, eager followers of the Blessed Beauty, to enlarge the scope of your endeavors in precisely that arena of action in which you strive so conscientiously to distinguish yourselves! For in the theme proposed by the United Nations—"Participation, Development, Peace"—can be perceived an affirmation that the goals pursued by you, as Bahá'ís, are at heart the very objects of the frenetic searchings of your despairing contemporaries.

You are already engaged in the thrust of the Seven Year Plan, which provides the framework for any further course of action you may now be moved by this new opportunity to adopt. International Youth Year will fall within the Plan's next phase; thus the activities you will undertake, and for which you will wish to prepare even now, cannot but enhance your contributions to the vitality of that Plan, while at the same time aiding the proceedings for the Youth Year. Let there be no delay, then, in the vigor of your response.

A highlight of this period of the Seven Year Plan has been the phenomenal proclamation accorded the Faith in the wake of the unabating persecutions in Iran; a new interest in its Teachings has been aroused on a wide scale. Simultaneously, more and more people from all strata of society frantically seek their true identity, which is to say, although they would not so plainly admit it, the spiritual meaning of their lives; prominent among these seekers are the young. Not only does this knowledge open fruitful avenues for Bahá'í initiative, it also indicates to young Bahá'ís a particular responsibility so to teach the Cause and live the life as to give vivid expression to those virtues that would fulfill the spiritual yearning of their peers.

For the sake of preserving such virtues much innocent blood has been shed in the past, and much, even today, is being sacrificed in Iran by young and old alike. Consider, for example, the instances in Shiraz last summer of the six young women, their ages ranging from 18 to 25 years, whose lives were snuffed out by the hangman's noose. All faced attempted inducements to recant their faith; all refused to deny their Beloved. Look also at the accounts of the astounding fortitude shown over and over again by children and youth who were subjected to the interrogations and abuses of teachers and mullahs and were expelled from school for upholding their beliefs. It, moreover, bears noting that under the restrictions so cruelly imposed on their community, the youth, rendered signal services, placing their energies at the disposal of Bahá'í institutions throughout the country. No splendor of speech could give more fitting testimony to their spiritual commitment and fidelity than these pure acts of selflessness and devotion. In virtually no other place on earth is so great a price for faith required of the Bahá'ís. Nor could there be found more willing, more radiant bearers of the cup of sacrifice than the valiant Bahá'í youth of Iran. Might it, then, not be reasonably expected that you, the youth and young adults living at such an extraordinary time, witnessing such stirring examples of the valor of your Iranian fellows, and exercising such freedom of movement, would sally forth, "unrestrained as the wind," into the field of Bahá'í action?

May you all persevere in your individual efforts to teach the Faith, but with added zest, to study the Writings, but with greater earnestness. May you pursue your education and training for future service to mankind, offering as much of your free time as possible to activities on behalf of the Cause. May those of you already bent on your life's work and who may have already founded families, strive toward becoming the living embodiments of Bahá'í ideals, both in the spiritual nurturing of your families and in your active involvement in the efforts on the home front or abroad in the pioneering field. May all respond to the current demands upon the Faith by displaying a fresh measure of dedication to the tasks at hand.

Further to these aspirations is the need for a mighty mobilization of teaching activities reflecting regularity in the patterns of service rendered by young Bahá'ís. The native urge of youth to move from place to place, combined with their abounding zeal, indicates that you can become more deliberately and numerous involved in these activities as travelling teachers. One pattern of this mobilization could be short-term projects, carried out at home or in other lands, dedicated to both teaching the Faith and improving the living conditions of people. Another could be that, while still young and unburdened by family responsibilities, you give attention to the idea of volunteering a set period, say, one or two years, to some Bahá'í service, on the home front or abroad, in the teaching or development field. It would accrue to the strength and stability of the community if such patterns could be followed by succeeding generations of youth. Regardless of the modes of service, however, youth must be understood to be fully engaged, at all times, in all climes and under all conditions. In your varied pursuits you may rest assured of the loving support and guidance of the Bahá'í institutions operating at every level.

Our ardent prayers, our unshakable confidence in your ability to succeed, our imperishable love surround you in all you endeavor to do in the path of service to the Blessed Perfection.

[signed: 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 Counselors. Its sphere of service has been immensely extended by the assignment of new responsibilities and by raising the number of its Counselor members to seven. The dedicated services of the Counselors in all the continents, ably supported by the Auxiliary Board members, have been invaluable in fostering the spiritual health and integrity of the worldwide 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 Caracollo, 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 offense 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 program 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 fullness 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 practicing 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 Ridván 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 Ridván 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 neighbors 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

13 May 1984

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On Thursday, 10 May 1984, The Universal House of Justice instructed the Bahá'í International Community in New York to issue the following press release and to keep the appropriate United Nations agencies informed of the continuing persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

THE PERSECUTION OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF IRAN HAS TAKEN AN EXTREMELY SEVERE AND CRITICAL TURN.

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS ABDUCTIONS, EXECUTIONS, THE IMPRISONMENT OF HUNDREDS, DISMISSAL FROM JOBS, EXPULSION OF BAHÁ'Í CHILDREN FROM SCHOOLS, DESTRUCTION OF HOMES HAVE BEEN THE COMMON LOT OF THIS OPPRESSED COMMUNITY. NOW, HOWEVER, THE AUTHORITIES IN IRAN SEEM TO HAVE DECIDED TO SUBJECT PROMINENT BAHÁ'ÍS TO BARBARIC METHODS OF TORTURE TO EXTRACT FROM THEM CONFESSIONS TO THE FALSE CHARGES LEVELED AGAINST THEM.

TORTURE HAS BEEN USED ON BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS BEFORE, BUT HITHERTO THE PURPOSE HAS BEEN TO FORCE THEM TO RECAT THEIR FAITH OR REVEAL INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR FELLOW BELIEVERS. ALL BUT A FEW OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS REMAINED FIRM AND PREFERRED IMPRISONMENT AND DEATH TO RECATATION OF THEIR FAITH. RECENTLY AN ADDED OBJECTIVE SEEMS TO INSPIRE THE GOVERNMENT'S TORTURE-MONGERS.

ALTHOUGH IN ALL THESE YEARS, SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION, THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN IN POSSESSION, THROUGH CONFISCATION, OF ALL THE RECORDS AND FILES OF THE ENTIRE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM IN IRAN, IT HAS FAILED TO PRODUCE A SINGLE SHRED OF EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ITS REITERATED ACCUSATION THAT THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY IN IRAN IS A NETWORK OF FOREIGN SPIES AND AGENTS. IT WOULD SEEM THAT NOW IT HAS DETERMINED TO MANUFACTURE BY MEANS OF FALSE CONFESSIONS EXTRACTED UNDER TORTURE, EVIDENCE TO ENABLE IT TO PUBLICLY JUSTIFY ITS INHUMAN PERSECUTION OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY OF IRAN. WE KNOW OF THREE BAHÁ'ÍS WHOSE WILLS HAVE BEEN BROKEN UNDER THIS BARBARIC TORTURE AND WHO HAVE SUBMITTED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE AUTHORITIES, MAKING STATEMENTS ADMITTING TO A SERIES OF CRIMES. DOUBTLESS THE AUTHORITIES HOPE TO PUBLISH SIMILAR "CONFESSIONS" IN THE DAYS TO COME, MADE BY OTHER HAPLESS VICTIMS OF THIS FLAGITIOUS TREATMENT.

WE KNOW THE NAMES OF MANY BAHÁ'ÍS WHO ARE NOW BEING TORTURED, AND ALTHOUGH, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, THESE CANNOT BE PUBLICIZED, THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO SOME INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS.

In addition to the above press release, supplementary information was telexed to the Bahá'í International Community and selected National Spiritual Assemblies:

FOLLOWING IS SOME DESCRIPTION TORTURES TO ENABLE YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS GIVE FURTHER BACKGROUND AS NECESSARY. THIS INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM RELIABLE SOURCES INCLUDING EYEWITNESSES.

REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS, USUALLY LATE AT NIGHT, WILL SUDDENLY CONVERGE UPON HOME BAHÁ'Í FAMILY. AFTER ENGAGING IN VARIETY VERBALLY AND PHYSICALLY ABUSIVE ACTIONS INVOLVING THREATS AND RANSACKING HOUSEHOLD IN GUISE OF CONDUCTING SEARCH, THEY SEIZE ALL BAHÁ'Í BOOKS AND PAPERS AND FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS AND TAKE AS PRISONER WHOMEVER THEY ARE INTERESTED IN APPREHENDING.

INTERROGATIONS OFTEN TAKE PLACE WHILE VICTIM SITS FACING WALL OR IS BLINDFOLDED SO THAT HE OR SHE MAY NOT IDENTIFY INTERROGATORS. USUALLY SUCH VICTIMS ARE CURSED, REVILED, BEATEN AND SUBJECTED TO EXTREME PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES DURING COURSE THESE INTERROGATIONS.

THERE ARE INSTANCES OF PRISONERS BEING PLACED IN TOTAL SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN ISOLATED CELL 1.70 METERS BY 2 METERS AND HELD THERE FOR WEEKS OR EVEN MONTHS WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SPEAK TO ANYONE WHATEVER, NOT EVEN PRISON GUARD.

IN OTHER INSTANCES BAHÁ'Í PRISONER, MAN OR WOMAN, WILL BE TIED FIRMLY TO SPECIALLY DESIGNED TABLE AND WHIPPED MERCILESSLY ON ALL PARTS BODY, BUT PARTICULARLY ON SOLES FEET. PERIODICALLY PRISONER WILL BE CHECKED AS TO WHETHER HIS WILL HAS BEEN BROKEN AND HE IS WILLING EMBRACE PURPOSES PRISON AUTHORITIES. AS LONG AS HE RESISTS, THIS PHYSICAL ASSAULT IS REPEATED MORNING AND EVENING, RESULTING IN SWELLING PRISONER'S LEGS ON WHICH HE IS COMPELLED TO WALK. PRISONER EXPERIENCES GREAT THIRST IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES AND IS FORCED IN THIS CONDITION TO WALK UNAIDED TO SLAKE THIRST WITH GLASS WATER ALLURINGLY DISPLAYED SOME DISTANCE FROM HIM. INTERNAL BODILY INJURY ALSO RESULTS FROM SEVERE BEATINGS—INVARIABLY PRISONER PASSES BLOOD IN URINE. TO KEEP PRISONER ALIVE SOMETIMES DOCTOR WILL BE SUMMONED TO APPLY SUPERFICIAL TREATMENT.

IN CASES WHEN BOTH WIFE AND HUSBAND ARE PRISONERS, ONE WILL BE SHOWN DAMAGED BODY OF THE OTHER DURING COURSE OF INTERROGATION. CRIES AND MOANS OF TORTURED PRISONERS REVERBERATE THROUGH PRISON AND ARE HEARD BY INMATES WHOSE TURN WILL SOON COME.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Kindly share this information with the believers in your community, and use it as a basis for answering inquiries which you may receive from news media or government officials.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



21 May 1984

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

FURTHER TO OUR MESSAGE OF 10 MAY REGARDING TORTURE BEING INFLICTED BAHÁ'ÍS IRAN WE SEND FOLLOWING SUMMARY OVERALL SITUATION THAT COUNTRY FROM MOST RECENT INFORMATION PROVIDED BY RELIABLE SOURCES.

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION MORE THAN 300 RESIDENCES OF BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE BEEN PLUNDERED OR SET ON FIRE.

SOME 170 BAHÁ'ÍS, MOST OF THEM PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY, HAVE BEEN KILLED BY A VARIETY OF METHODS, BUT PRINCIPALLY THROUGH EXECUTION BY FIRING SQUADS AND BY HANGING.

IN URBAN AREAS PROPERTIES BELONGING TO SEVERAL HUNDRED FAMILIES HAVE BEEN SEIZED, WHILE IN RURAL AREAS MANY ORCHARDS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND FARMS AND ARABLE LANDS CONFISCATED. PETITIONS TO THE AUTHORITIES FOR REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES HAVE BEEN IGNORED.

THE MINISTRY OF WORKS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORMALLY INSTRUCTED INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL INSTITUTIONS NOT TO PAY THEIR BAHÁ'Í STAFF.

MORE THAN 10,000 BAHÁ'ÍS EMPLOYED IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES OR IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAVE BEEN SUMMARILY DISCHARGED, THEIR RIGHTS TO PENSIONS AND OTHER EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS REVOKED. DEMANDS WERE MADE OF A NUMBER OF THEM TO REFUND THE SALARIES THEY HAD RECEIVED FOR THE DURATION OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT.

BAHÁ'Í STUDENTS HAVE BEEN DISMISSED FROM ALL UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING.

IN MOST CITIES AND PROVINCES, BAHÁ'Í CHILDREN HAVE BEEN DENIED ENTRY TO SCHOOLS AND THEREFORE HAVE NO ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION.

SOME 700 BAHÁ'ÍS, INCLUDING MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, ARE BEING HELD IN VARIOUS PRISONS THROUGHOUT IRAN.

FOR MORE THAN NINE MONTHS VISITS TO 40 BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS HAVE BEEN STRICTLY PROHIBITED BY THE AUTHORITIES. THEIR FATE IS THEREFORE UNKNOWN.

IN EVIN AND GAWHAR-DASHT PRISONS A NUMBER OF BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS ARE UNDERGOING RELENTLESS TORTURE IN AN EFFORT ON THE PART OF THE AUTHORITIES TO FORCE THEM TO ADMIT TO FALSE CHARGES OF ENGAGING IN ESPIONAGE AND ACTING AGAINST THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN. FOR A PERIOD OF MONTHS THEY HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO FLOGGINGS OF ALL PARTS OF THE BODY, PARTICULARLY THE LEGS AND FEET. SOMETIMES UP TO 400 STROKES BY WIRE CABLES HAVE BEEN ADMINISTERED TO ONE PRISONER, THEN HE OR SHE HAS BEEN MADE TO WALK. FINDING THIS IMPOSSIBLE, THE UNFORTUNATE PRISONER HAS BEEN FORCED TO CRAWL ON HANDS AND KNEES BACK TO A DARK CELL. IN MASHHAD AND YAZD BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS ARE REGULARLY WHIPPED ON THE HEAD AND FACE WITH THICK PLASTIC TUBES, SIMILAR PROCEDURES ARE USED TO A LESSER DEGREE IN OTHER PRISONS. A NUMBER OF THESE VICTIMS OF TORTURE HAVE LOST THEIR SIGHT AND HEARING, OTHERS THEIR MENTAL COMPETENCE. THE BODIES OF FOUR PRISONERS SUBJECTED TO SUCH TREATMENT WERE SEEN BEFORE BEING BURIED IN UNKNOWN GRAVES. IT IS THEREFORE FEARED THAT OTHER PRISONERS WHOSE BODIES HAVE BEEN SIMILARLY BURIED WITHOUT THEIR FAMILIES BEING NOTIFIED SUFFERED THE SAME FATE.

BAHÁ'ÍS ARE UNSAFE IN THEIR OWN HOMES, WHICH ARE ENTERED AT WILL, DAY OR NIGHT, BY REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS, WHO HARASS THE INHABITANTS BY INSULTING, THREATENING AND BEATING THEM. WHEN THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS INVADE A HOME WITH THE INTENTION OF ARRESTING A PARTICULAR BAHÁ'Í, IF THAT PERSON HAPPENS TO BE ABSENT, THEIR PRACTICE IS TO SEIZE AS HOSTAGES OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD, EVEN CHILDREN, AND TO RANSACK THE PLACE, CONFISCATING WHATEVER THEY PLEASE.

WHENEVER THE HEAD OR SOME OTHER IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HAS BEEN KILLED, AND OFTEN WHEN SUCH A PERSON HAS BEEN IMPRISONED, THOSE REMAINING BEHIND HAVE BEEN FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES AND NOT PERMITTED TO TAKE ANY BELONGINGS, EVEN IN THE DEAD OF WINTER. THE VICTIMS OF SUCH TREATMENT HAVE NO RECOURSE TO JUSTICE SINCE THEIR PETITIONS TO THE AUTHORITIES ARE IGNORED. BAHÁ'Í FAMILIES IN ISFAHAN, MASHHAD, TEHRAN, URÚMÍYYIH AND YAZD IN PARTICULAR ARE AFFECTED BY THESE CONDITIONS....

FOLLOWING INFORMATION JUST RECEIVED: EXECUTION FOUR MORE COURAGEOUS BRETHREN IRAN

|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| TABRÍZ, 5<br>MAY  | — | MR. JALÁL PAYRAVÍ, IMPRISONED 22 OCTOBER 1981<br>MR. MAQŞÚD 'ALÍZÁDIH, IMPRISONED 27 JANUARY 1982   |
| TEHRAN, 15<br>MAY | — | MR. 'ALÍ-MUḤAMMAD ZAMÁNÍ, 45 YEARS OLD<br>MR. JAHÁNGÍR HIDÁYATÍ, 61 YEAR OLD CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER,<br>MEMBER NOW DISSOLVED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY KIDNAPPED JUNE 1983 |

BOTH TORTURED DURING IMPRISONMENT

IN ADDITION, MR. ASADU'LLÁH KÁMIL-MUQADDAM DIED IN PRISON 2 MAY CIRCUMSTANCES UNKNOWN.

FRIENDS IRAN FEEL SITUATION DANGEROUS GREAT NUMBER OTHER BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

12 June 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 18 October 1983 was received by The Universal House of Justice and it was very glad to note that many of the problems seemed to have been resolved. It regrets the delay in replying to you, but, as you will understand, the pressure of work has been very heavy and, as the additional clarification that you requested did not seem to be a matter of urgency, a reply has been postponed until now. On the points you raised we have now been instructed to convey the following comments.

As you quite correctly appreciate, the fundamental purpose of all religion is the spiritual development of the souls of human beings. This is expressed in the Short Obligatory Prayer, and also there is the following very clear statement written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer on 8 December 1935:

How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man's moral and spiritual life.

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has that fallen, religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And

this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore realize fully the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, [as] already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God.

(Published in U.S. *Bahá'í News*, No. 102, August 1936, p. 3)

In addition to this fundamental purpose underlying all Revelation, there is a particular central purpose for each Dispensation. The one for this Dispensation is the establishment of the oneness of the world of humanity, and it is a Bahá'í teaching that the spiritual development of the soul requires not merely prayer and meditation, but also active service to one's fellowmen in accordance with the laws and principles of the Revelation of God. The reconstruction of human society and the spiritual advancement of individual souls go hand in hand.

People are in many different conditions, come from many different backgrounds, and face many different problems in attaining unity in spirit and practice. Our guiding light is the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. The Administrative Order is the strong framework within which we work and the channel for the outflowing of the spirit into the world.

All Bahá'ís are fallible human beings, each one has his own insights, enthusiasms and degree of wisdom and understanding. Differences of viewpoint could cause the community to fragment into a thousand pieces, if it were not cemented together by the strong bond of the Covenant, and if the friends were not willing to subordinate their own ideas to the considered decisions that issue from the divinely ordained process of consultation and, at the same time, exercise the utmost forbearance towards their fellow believers, their individual characteristics and their shortcomings. One of the most potent statements of the Guardian, which illuminates many issues, is:

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. *Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.*

Since we are all imperfect and have to learn the perfect standard which Bahá'u'lláh has unveiled, there are often things in the Teachings themselves which individual believers find difficult, and which they have to

strive to learn and understand. All the believers are growing and this is a gradual process. Each one, as you say, must develop wisdom, and with this must realize the fundamental importance of the unity of the community and the bond of love and affection among the believers, for the sake of which he will sacrifice many things....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

25 July 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter which raised questions concerning the status of men and women especially within the family setting. We are requested by the House of Justice to convey to you the following points.

The Universal House of Justice invites you once again to carefully read the letter written on its behalf and addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, dated 28 December 1980. This letter is published in the compilation *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*, pp. 57–61.

Authoritative interpretation of the Writings was the exclusive domain of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. When the House of Justice stated that the “father can be regarded as the ‘head’ of the family,” it was giving expression to its own inference as you indicate. This inference, as the letter to New Zealand points out, is based on the clear and primary responsibility of the husband to provide for the financial support of the wife and family, and on the provisions of the law of intestacy, which assigns special functions and rights to the eldest son.

The description of the husband as “head” of the family does not confer superiority upon the husband nor does it give him special rights to undermine the rights of the other members of his family. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary...

The relationship between family members represents a complex of mutual and complementary duties and responsibilities that are implemented within the framework of the Bahá'í ideal of family life and are conducive to its unity. The concept of a Bahá'í family is based on the principle that the man is charged with the responsibility of supporting the entire family financially, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This does not mean that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations. Furthermore, while primary responsibility is

assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women would be breadwinners. (See pages 59–60 of *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*)

The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

There are a number of Tablets on marriage. You are referred, for example, to *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 117–22, and *Bahá'í Prayers* (United States, 1982 Edition), pp. 104–08.

In relation to the particular "Marriage Tablet" to which you refer, we provide, for your information, an extract from a letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly on 4 April 1976, which deals with the use of this "Tablet":

The so-called "Marriage Tablet" ... is not a Tablet at all but is an unauthenticated record by Ahmad Sohrab of a talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The friends may use it, but it should be made clear that this is not Scripture ...

*The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (1982 Edition) provides much useful source material on the subject of the equality of men and women. For talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá citing historical examples, see particularly:

Talk to the Federation of Women's Clubs, pp. 74–77

Talk to a woman's suffrage meeting, pp. 133–37

Talk at Franklin Square House, pp. 280–84

We trust that the foregoing information will resolve your concerns and help to reinforce your sense of certitude.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



6 August 1984

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are requested by The Universal House of Justice to thank you for your letter of 10 July 1984 recounting the electrifying events which took place at the closing session of your last National Convention. The House of Justice was deeply moved to learn of the enthusiastic response that the delegates and others present made to the inspiring talk given by the Hand of the Cause of God Zikrullah Khadem, and by their desire, expressed on the scroll which you have forwarded to the World Center, for the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to be applied to all believers in the United States.

In response to this petition The Universal House of Justice has decided that, although it is not yet timely to apply this mighty law in the West, it will send to the believers in the United States and other Western countries a translation into English of a compilation of texts so that they will be able to familiarize themselves with this subject. This translation is now being prepared and when it is complete an appropriate announcement will be made which will constitute the first step in the process of applying this law of God to the Western Bahá'í communities.

Kindly share this letter with the friends in your area of jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

12 August 1984

[To an individual]

From: The Universal House of Justice

...We are very glad to see that the Assembly is taking steps to educate the friends in the laws of the Faith and to emphasize the importance of obedience to them....

1. It would seem to be important to make clear to the friends that the "laws" of the Faith must be regarded in various lights. There are laws, ordinances, exhortations and principles, all of which are sometimes loosely referred to as "laws." All are very important for the life of the community and the spiritual life of the individual, but they are applied differently. Some affect the society and the social relationships and the Spiritual Assemblies are responsible for their enforcement. If a believer breaks such a law, he is subject to the imposition of sanctions. Others, although of very great importance, are not sanctionable, because their observance is a matter of conscience between the individual and God; among these fall the laws of prayer and fasting and the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Then there are those high ethical standards to which Bahá'u'lláh calls His followers, such as trustworthiness, abstention from backbiting, and so on; generally speaking obedience to these is a matter for individual conscience, and the Assemblies should not pry into people's lives to see whether or not they are following them; nevertheless, if a believer's conduct falls so far below the standard set by Bahá'u'lláh that it becomes a flagrant disgrace and brings the name of the Faith into disrepute, the Assembly would have to intervene, to encourage the believer to correct his ways, to warn him of the consequences of continued misconduct, and possibly, if he does not respond, to deprive him of his administrative rights.

In other words, the friends should realize the importance of following all the teachings, and not assume that merely because an offense is not punishable it is therefore less grave. Assemblies, on the other hand, should distinguish clearly between those laws which it is their duty to enforce, those which should be left strictly to the conscience of the individual, and those in which it may have to intervene if the misbehavior is blatant and injurious to the good name of the Faith....

2.

## 1. The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

23 August 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 29 July 1984 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

The seeker to whom you refer seems to have misconstrued the Bahá'í teachings about the responsibility of the parents for the education of their children. The father certainly has a very important role to play. In the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas" itself, Bahá'u'lláh revealed:

Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet.... He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the *first* educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months. This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role.

It may be helpful to stress to your seeker that the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women is clearly stated in the teachings, and the fact that there is diversity of function between them in certain areas does not negate this principle.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



Department of the Secretariat

25 October 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter dated 4 September 1984 in which you seek further clarification about the qualitative difference between the Guardian's prerogative of interpretation and the power of elucidation of The Universal House of Justice, and raise questions about other aspects of the Teachings. We are directed to convey the following comments.

As you are aware, The Universal House of Justice has written three major messages which explain, among other things, the duties and functions shared by the Guardian and The Universal House of Justice, and those functions that are unique to each specific Institution. These messages are published in *Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 44–56, and pp. 81–91, and in *Messages of The Universal House of Justice: 1968–1973*, pp. 37–44. In relation to their specific functions, Shoghi Effendi explained that “it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that The Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating in matters not expressly revealed in the teachings.”

The use of the term “elucidation” by The Universal House of Justice and the process by which it is implemented are based on passages in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and statements in the writings of the Guardian. For example, in the Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

It is incumbent upon these members (of The Universal House of Justice) to ... deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book . . . and bear upon daily transactions, . . . (p. 20)

Further, in response to a question raised by the American National Spiritual Assembly about the Universal Court of Arbitration, the Guardian in a letter dated 9 April 1923, defined such explanation as being in the domain of The Universal House of Justice and anticipated its function of elucidation:

... regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by The Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master's explicit Instructions, all important fundamental questions must be referred.... (*Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47)

In a letter dated 9 March 1965, The Universal House of Justice stresses the “profound difference” that exists between the “interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to ‘deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.’” (*Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 52) Among these is the outlining of such steps as are necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh on this earth. The elucidations of The Universal House of Justice stem from its legislative function, while the interpretations of the Guardian represent the true intent inherent in the Sacred Texts. The major distinction between the two functions is that legislation with its resultant outcome of elucidation is susceptible of amendment by the House of Justice itself, whereas the Guardian’s interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied.

Shoghi Effendi has given categorical assurances that neither the Guardian nor The Universal House of Justice “can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.” Therefore, the friends can be sure that The Universal House of Justice will not engage in interpreting the Holy Writings....

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

3 January 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

DISTRESSED INFORM YOU THAT RECENTLY IRANIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ANOTHER OPPRESSIVE MEASURE AGAINST BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS. IN ORDER TO BE RELEASED PRISONER MUST SIGN FOLLOWING UNDERTAKING: "I THE UNDERSIGNED [DETAILS OF PERSONAL STATUS INCLUDING RELIGION] UNDERTAKE NOT TO HAVE IN MY POSSESSION ANY BOOK, PAMPHLET, DOCUMENT, SYMBOL OR PICTURE OF THIS MISGUIDED, ZIONIST, ESPIONAGE GROUP OF BAHÁ'ÍS. IF ANY OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED ARTICLES BELONGING TO THIS HATED UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT IS FOUND ON MY PERSON OR IN MY HOME, THIS WILL BE TANTAMOUNT TO MY BEING OF THOSE 'WHO WAR AGAINST GOD' AND THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL WOULD BE FREE TO DECIDE AGAINST ME IN THE MANNER HE DEEMS FIT." THE TERMINOLOGY "WHO WAR AGAINST GOD" IS A TERM USED BY PRESENT REGIME TO SIGNIFY A CRIME DESERVING SENTENCE OF DEATH. BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS HAVE REFUSED SIGN SUCH AN INFAMOUS DOCUMENT FALSELY IMPUGNING THEIR FAITH. MOREOVER SIGNING SUCH A DOCUMENT WOULD LEAVE BAHÁ'ÍS OPEN TO HAVING SUCH ITEMS PLANTED ON THEIR PERSON OR IN THEIR HOMES. WAVE OF RECENT ARRESTS OF BAHÁ'ÍS SUGGESTS THAT AUTHORITIES PLAN EXERT PRESSURE ALL BAHÁ'ÍS TO SIGN SUCH AN IMPOSSIBLE UNDERTAKING. OBVIOUSLY FAITHFUL FRIENDS WILL REFUSE SUCCUMB SUCH CONTEMPTIBLE PLAN....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE



23 January 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

1986 has been named the International Year of Peace by the United Nations. Considering the dangers surrounding mankind and the remedial prospects of the Lesser Peace to which Bahá'u'lláh has summoned the nations, we embrace this God-sent opportunity to proclaim ever more widely and convincingly the vitalizing principles upon which, as our Teachings emphatically assert, a lasting peace must be founded. The nature and variety of the proclamation activities which the Bahá'í community will undertake, during 1986 and beyond, will be outlined in detail later. We wish now to indicate some of the ideas we are contemplating, so that you may sense what to expect and how to prepare for your own participation.

In addition to projects to be initiated at the World Center, these ideas include:

- Calling upon local and national Bahá'í communities to sponsor a wide range of activities which will engage the attention of people from all walks of life to various topics relevant to peace, such as: the role of women, the elimination of racism, the eradication of prejudice, the promotion of education, the extension of social and economic development, the adoption of a world auxiliary language, the establishment of world government;
- Mounting a publicity campaign which will make use of such themes as “world peace through world religion,” “world peace through world education,” “world peace through world language,” “world peace through world law”—a campaign which could lead to discussion of these subjects in small or large gatherings, at local or national levels, and perhaps in collaboration with organizations promoting such ideas;
- Urging the publishing within and without the Bahá'í community of a wide assortment of literature, posters and other graphic materials on peace;
- Requesting Bahá'í magazines—children, youth, adult—whether intended for internal or external circulation, to carry special features on peace;

- Inviting Bahá'í radio stations to devote particular attention to this theme;
- Asking the Associations for Bahá'í Studies to conduct programs on peace;
- Encouraging Bahá'í artists and musicians to contribute, and consider inviting their non-Bahá'í colleagues to contribute, to the effectiveness of such activities by giving expression through the various arts to important themes relating to world peace.

In effect, we envision a proclamation campaign which will not only involve large public events and the use of the mass media, but will also engage people at the grassroots and at all other levels of society in a broad range of profoundly effective activities through which they will interact with the Bahá'í community in a sustained, worldwide effort to attend to the fundamental issues of peace, aided by the unique insights provided by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

As you contemplate what possibilities these and similar ideas suggest for your own plans, we advise you to take preparatory steps to hold within your jurisdiction, during 1986, local and national peace conferences to which public officials and other prominent persons should be invited. In those places where national conferences may not be possible, local conferences should certainly be held.

In some regions, neighboring National Assemblies may find it convenient to pool their resources and hold regional conferences instead of national ones. These need not be very large, but should be effective enough to make a good impression on the public as well as on the national Bahá'í communities involved. It is left to the initiative of the National Assemblies, in consultation with Continental Counselors, to hold such conferences.

Simultaneously as you make initial arrangements for the conferences, you will also want to find out what plans are being made by the governments and organizations in your respective countries, so that you will know beforehand how to coordinate your own programs with the programs of others in ways most conducive to the proclamation of the Faith and the mutual benefit of all concerned.

We would welcome any thoughts and suggestions you may have on the activities to be undertaken by you during the International Year of Peace.

Your planning efforts for 1986 must not, of course, interrupt the work of the Seven Year Plan. Indeed, the activities associated with the economic and social development of the Bahá'í community, the observance during 1985 of International Youth Year, and the anticipated activities for the peace campaign to begin a year hence are mutually reinforcing and go far to enhance the teaching opportunities necessary to the successful completion of the Plan. We have every confidence that your continuing exertions to meet the new challenges resulting from the emergence of the Faith from obscurity will be richly rewarded by the Blessed Beauty; and we shall renew our supplications at the Holy Threshold that your brightest expectations may be surpassed by resounding triumph.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

31 January 1985

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 13 December 1984 inquiring about the Lesser Peace and the Supreme Tribunal referred to in the writings of the Faith. We are asked to convey the following comments.

Bahá'u'lláh's principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá'ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá'í community. This does not mean, however, that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God's good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his "The Goal of a New World Order." In connection with the steps that will lead to this latter stage, The Universal House of Justice will certainly determine what has to be done, in accordance with the guidance in the Writings, such as the passage you quoted from *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 89. In the meantime, the Bahá'ís will undoubtedly continue to do all in their power to promote the establishment of peace.

The Universal House of Justice is greatly pleased with the initiative you have taken with others to start an organization through which youth can contribute their considerable energies and creative abilities towards fostering world peace. It fully appreciates the wisdom of your approach in not affiliating your organization directly with the Faith and finds your leaflet describing the aims of Youth for World Peace most impressive. Since 1986 has been designated the International Year of Peace by the United Nations, your efforts are timely and will blend with the activities to be undertaken by the Bahá'í community during that year and beyond.

In your worthy endeavors to pursue your goal to create a peace movement of youth around the world which would draw non-Bahá'í youth within the influence of Bahá'í concepts, you should seek the advice of your National Spiritual Assembly, which is in a position to give you necessary advice.

Regarding your question about the Supreme Tribunal, enclosed are a few extracts from statements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi on this subject; also included is a statement on the Lesser Peace.

We are asked by the House of Justice to assure you of its ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your noble efforts may contribute significantly to the upraising of the banner of peace in the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

So long as these prejudices survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars.

To remedy this condition there must be universal peace. To bring this about, a Supreme Tribunal must be established, representative of all governments and peoples; questions both national and international must be referred thereto, and all must carry out the decrees of this Tribunal. Should any government or people disobey, let the whole world arise against that government or people.

*(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, [Rev. ed.] [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982], p. 249)*

For example, the question of universal peace, about which Bahá'u'lláh says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. But the Supreme Tribunal which Bahá'u'lláh has described will fulfill this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And His plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation—that is to say parliaments—should elect two or three persons who are the choicest of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that

country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. The Supreme Tribunal will be composed of these people and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is! But by a limited and restricted League the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should. This is the truth about the situation, which has been stated....

(Tablet to the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace,  
*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 306–7)

A Supreme Tribunal shall be established by the peoples and Governments of every nation, composed of members elected from each country and Government. The members of this Great Council shall assemble in unity. All disputes of an international character shall be submitted to this Court, its work being to arrange by arbitration everything which otherwise would be a cause of war. The mission of this Tribunal would be to prevent war.

(*Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*,  
11th ed. [London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979], p. 155)

### **From letters written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believers**

#### *The Supreme Tribunal*

The Universal Court of Arbitration and the International Tribunal are the same. When the Bahá'í State will be established they will be merged in The Universal House of Justice.

(17 June 1933)

As regards the International Executive referred to by the Guardian in his “Goal of a New World Order,” it should be noted that this statement refers by no means to the Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, but simply to that world government which will herald the advent and lead to the final establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The formation of this International Executive, which corresponds to the executive head or board in present-day national governments, is but a step leading to the Bahá'í world government of the future, and hence should not be identified with either the institution of the Guardianship or that of the International House of Justice.

(17 March 1934) (refers to pp. 40–41 of  
*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*)

1 and 2 The Supreme Tribunal is an aspect of a World Super-state; the exact nature of its relationship to that State we cannot at present foresee.

(19 November 1945)

The above statement was in reply to the following questions:

Is the Supreme Tribunal the world court or world tribunal referred to in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” p. 43, and “Goal of a New World Order,” p. 20? [See *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 203 and 41.] Is it part of the world Super-State just as our Supreme Court is part of the federal government at Washington?

Will the Supreme Tribunal (a world court) exist apart from the world government?

*The Lesser Peace*

With reference to the question you have asked concerning the time and means through which the Lesser and Most Great Peace, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, will be established, following the coming World War: Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of The Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í superstate—your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization.”

(14 March 1939)

Department of the Secretariat

14 March 1985

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 16 January 1985 in which you share the anguish of your heart and express deep concern for the fate of the suffering masses of mankind has been received by The Universal House of Justice. We are instructed to convey this reply to you.

The world is clearly beset by ills and is groaning under the burden of appalling suffering. The trials of the innocent are indeed heartrending and constitute a mystery that the mind of man cannot fathom. Even the Prophets of God Themselves have borne Their share of grievous afflictions in every age. Yet in spite of the evidence of all this suffering, God's Manifestations, Whose lives and wisdom show Them to have been far above human beings in understanding, unitedly bear testimony to the justice, love and mercy of God.

To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend. According to the words of our beloved Guardian: "The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God." We can confidently anticipate therefore, the arrival of the "new life-giving spring" once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

As Bahá'ís, we know that the "sovereign remedy" for each and every one of these ills lies in turning and submitting to the "skilled," the "all-powerful" and "inspired Physician." Bahá'u'lláh has assured us in His writings that God has not forsaken us. He is the All-Seeing and All-Knowing, the "prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God" to those who turn to Him in supplication, and He intervenes actively in human history by sending His Manifestations, Sources of knowledge and spiritual truth to "liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance" and to "ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind." In this Age, God has determined to establish His everlasting Kingdom among men, and so, to this end, He sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations, Who alas, were rejected by the generality of people.



When we contemplate the fate of mankind, it is important to reflect on the very complex arena in which man plays out the drama of his existence. There are a number of elements involved. For example, man is a spiritual being located within the material creation; hence he is subjected to opposing forces, and has to live in accordance with values which refer to two worlds, the material world with all its imperfections and the spiritual world with its perfections. Tension derives from the fact that "In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone." Man's actions then have both a material and spiritual consequence. While the material effect of his actions is usually clearly perceptible, their spiritual effect can only be determined by reference to spiritual principles revealed by the Manifestation of God. Suffering and trials, sent by God to test and perfect His creatures, are another integral part of life. They contain the potential for man's progress or retrogression, depending on the individual's response. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

The souls who bear the tests of God become the manifestations of great bounties; for the divine trials cause some souls to become entirely lifeless, while they cause the holy souls to ascend to the highest degree of love and solidity....

In addition to the factors associated with man's station and nature, the Writings indicate that man's soul "is independent of all infirmities of body or mind," and not only continues to exist "after departing from this mortal world," but progresses "through the bounty and grace of the Lord." Therefore, an evaluation of man's material existence and achievements cannot ignore the potential spiritual development stimulated by the individual's desire to manifest the attributes of God and his response to the exigencies of his life, nor can it exclude the possibility of the operations of God's mercy in terms of compensation for earthly suffering, in the next life.

God in His bounty has endowed every created thing, however humble, "with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue." And, reminiscent of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Gleanings* (page 149), draws our attention to the need to make efforts to develop and demonstrate in action our God-given potential:

All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth....

Is it not an evidence of the justice of God that each of us, whether materially comfortable or struggling for physical survival, is assessed in terms of the efforts we have made to seize whatever opportunities existed in our lives, to develop and use our allotted talent, be it large or small? "Each shall receive his share from thy Lord," is Bahá'u'lláh's assurance. Thus, if we bestir ourselves, we will all have access to the rewards of this life and the next.

In the same passage from the *Gleanings*, Bahá'u'lláh also raises the possibility that possessing free will, human beings may well commit evil and "wittingly" break "His law." By the exercise of his free will, man either affirms his spiritual purpose in life or chooses to perpetuate evil by living below his highest station.

The question is asked: "Is such a behavior to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves?" And concludes:

Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves....

The amelioration of the conditions of the world requires the reconstruction of human society and efforts to improve the material well-being of humanity. The Bahá'í approach to this task is evolutionary and multifaceted, involving not only the spiritual transformation of individuals but the establishment of an administrative system based on the application of justice, a system which is at once the "nucleus" and the "pattern" of the future World Order, together with the implementation of programs of social and economic development that derive their impetus from the grass roots of the community. Such an integrated approach will inevitably create a new world, a world where human dignity is restored and the burden of inequity is lifted from the shoulders of humanity. Then will the generations look back with heartfelt appreciation, for the sacrifices made by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, during this most turbulent period in human history.

With regard to your concern that certain remote geographical regions have historically been deprived of Divine Revelation, the following extracts indicate that there are many other Prophets Who have appeared in the world, but Whose names are not mentioned in the Scriptures with which we are familiar, for example:

And to every people have we sent an apostle...

(*Qur'án*, XVI, 38)

God hath raised up Prophets and revealed Books as numerous as the creatures of the world, and will continue to do so to everlasting.

(*Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 125)

Know thou that the absence of any reference to them [Prophets before Adam] is no proof that they did not actually exist. That no records concerning them are now available, should be attributed to their extreme remoteness, as well as to the vast changes which the earth hath undergone since their time.

(*Gleanings*, p. 172)

While Asia has clearly been blessed as the birthplace of many Manifestations of God, we have found nothing in the Writings to suggest exactly where in the world these Messengers of God in the remote past, may have arisen. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, we have the promise that "... there always have been Manifestations of God, but we do not have any record of Their names."

We are instructed to assure you that The Universal House of Justice will offer prayers at the Holy Shrines that your faith may be deepened and your perplexities resolved, and we share with you these solacing words of Bahá'u'lláh:

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of the sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

*(Gleanings, p. 329)*

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

11 April 1985

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your very thoughtful letter and instructs us to convey the following answer to you.

While some opportunities for service in the Administrative Order are clearly reserved for those who are over twenty-one years of age, the importance of attaining spiritual maturity at the age of fifteen is that it marks that point in life at which the believer takes firmly into his own hands the responsibility for his spiritual destiny. At age fifteen, the individual has the privilege of affirming, in his own name, his faith in Bahá'u'lláh. For while the children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís, they do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. Therefore, when they come of age, they must, of their own volition, express their belief.

Having reached the age of fifteen, Bahá'í youth are personally responsible for certain spiritual activities such as observing the obligation of daily prayer, keeping the Fast, and they are invited to participate in Bahá'í youth activities. The significance of the age of maturity, however, goes far beyond the fulfillment of responsibilities. The following extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá links the attainment of maturity with the deepening of one's understanding and comprehension of the realities of life, and the enhancement of one's very capacity for understanding:

Know thou that before maturity man liveth from day to day and comprehendeth only such matters as are superficial and outwardly obvious. However, when he cometh of age he understandeth the realities of things and the inner truths. Indeed, in his comprehension, his feelings, his deductions and his discoveries, every day of his life after maturity is equal to a year before it.

The signing of a card is simply the means by which the individual indicates his desire to be registered as a Bahá'í youth, as a member of the Bahá'í community, and it enables the National Spiritual Assembly to keep an accurate record of the membership of the community...

The Universal House of Justice assures you that it will offer prayers at the Holy Shrines that you will strive to become an active and enlightened servant of the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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 cooperation 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 fulfill 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

8 May 1985

To the Bahá'í Youth of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We extend our loving greetings and best wishes to all who will meet in youth conferences yet to be held during International Youth Year. So eager and resourceful have been the responses of the Bahá'í youth in many countries to the challenges of this special year that we are moved to expressions of delight and high hope.

We applaud those youth who, in respect of this period, have already engaged in some activity within their national and local communities or in collaboration with their peers in other countries, and call upon them to persevere in their unyielding efforts to acquire spiritual qualities and useful qualifications. For if they do so, the influence of their high-minded motivations will exert itself upon world developments conducive to a productive, progressive and peaceful future.

May the youth activities begun this year be a fitting prelude to and an ongoing, significant feature throughout the International Year of Peace, 1986.

The present requirements of a Faith whose responsibilities rapidly increase in relation to its rise from obscurity impose an inescapable duty on the youth to ensure that their lives reflect to a marked degree the transforming power of the new Revelation they have embraced. Otherwise, by what example are the claims of Bahá'u'lláh to be judged? How is His healing Message to be acknowledged by a skeptical humanity if it produces no noticeable effect upon the young, who are seen to be among the most energetic, the most pliable and promising elements in any society?

The dark horizon faced by a world which has failed to recognize the Promised One, the Source of its salvation, acutely affects the outlook of the younger generations; their distressing lack of hope and their indulgence in desperate but futile and even dangerous solutions make a direct claim on the remedial attention of Bahá'í youth, who, through their knowledge of that Source and the bright vision with which they have thus been endowed, cannot hesitate to impart to their despairing fellow youth the restorative joy, the constructive hope, the radiant assurances of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation.

The words, the deeds, the attitudes, the lack of prejudice, the nobility of character, the high sense of service to others—in a word, those qualities and actions which distinguish a Bahá'í must unfailingly characterize their inner life and outer behavior, and their interactions with friend or foe.



Rejecting the low sights of mediocrity, let them scale the ascending heights of excellence in all they aspire to do. May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning, in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.

Indeed, let them welcome with confidence the challenges awaiting them. Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind —this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavor. Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvelous, indispensable achievements of the past. The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.

We commend these thoughts to your private contemplation and to the consultations you conduct about your future.

And we offer the assurance of our prayerful remembrances of you, our trust and confidence.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

21 July 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

**Election of Delegates to National Conventions**

As you are aware, some national communities elect their delegates to the National Convention on the basis of areas which have Local Spiritual Assemblies, while in other, larger, national communities delegates are elected on the basis of electoral units in which all adult believers have the vote.

In view of the growth of the Faith and the developing life of the Bahá'í communities, The Universal House of Justice has decided that, notwithstanding that in some countries the number of believers and of Local Spiritual Assemblies is still small, the time has come for delegates to National Conventions everywhere to be elected on the basis of electoral units, but with the option of introducing certain differences from the procedures followed to date. These differences are explained below and are designed to make the system adaptable to the variations in the make-up of the many Bahá'í communities and in the geography of the lands in which they are situated.

The House of Justice has decided that the number of delegates to each National Convention will remain unchanged for the present. However, if a National Assembly finds that under the new system a change would be advisable, it should feel free to write to the World Center stating the reasons for its view.

When establishing the electoral unit basis for the election of delegates, a National Spiritual Assembly should divide the territory under its jurisdiction into electoral units, based on the number of adult Bahá'ís in each area, in such a way that each unit will be responsible for electing preferably one delegate only.

In addition to the voting, the opportunity for consultation with the delegates is important. Hitherto this has been achieved by calling a convention in each unit to which all the believers in that electoral unit are invited. The voting for delegates has then taken place at the unit conventions with provision for voting by mail for those who do not attend. In some areas these meetings have been very fruitful and have helped to foster collaboration among the believers in the unit. However, in other areas, no doubt for a number of reasons, attendance at unit conventions has been very low, as has been the voting by mail, and this has meant that the delegates have been elected by a relatively small proportion of the electorate. National

Assemblies are free to call unit conventions if they find they are successful, but if they find problems of attendance they may follow the alternative method described below.

Where holding unit conventions has proved ineffective, or does not seem to be a viable procedure, a National Assembly may divide each electoral unit into subunits of a convenient size. A meeting could then be held in each subunit to which all the adult believers residing therein would be invited. This should result in the participation of a large number of the believers. It is important to remember, however, that the delegate to be elected represents the *entire unit* and therefore, although the voting may be carried out in subunits, each voter has all the adult believers resident in the *entire unit* to choose from in voting for the delegate.

In some countries, it may even be too difficult to expect the believers throughout a subunit to gather together at a certain time, and so it would not be practical to hold subunit meetings. In such places a central point in each subunit could be chosen for the establishment of a polling station to which the friends would come to leave their ballots on the voting day as and when they can do so.

When one considers that there are now national Bahá'í communities varying in size from India to a single small island, some established in highly industrialized thickly populated countries, some in widely scattered archipelagoes, others covering equatorial jungles and still others embracing icebound arctic wastes, one can appreciate that a great deal of discretion must be accorded to each National Spiritual Assembly to establish the most effective means for the election of the delegates to its National Convention within the general principles outlined above.

Each National Spiritual Assembly should study and master the broad outlines of this system. All matters of detail should be decided by the National Assembly which should ensure that the friends are fully informed and thoroughly understand what they are expected to do. The help and advice of the Counselors and their Auxiliary Board members and assistants could be sought in working out these details and in educating the friends. It may also be desirable for the National Assembly to appoint a special national committee to organize the elections and to oversee them through unit or subunit committees or representatives. Such matters of detail could include the following:

- The number of delegates to be allocated to each unit. Although one for each unit is preferable, this may not be practicable in certain instances, such as in a unit which contains one or more very large local communities. In such cases it may be necessary to make the unit large enough to be the electoral base for two or possibly three delegates.
- The number and size of subunits. These could be as many as there are Local Spiritual Assemblies in a unit, the boundaries being so delineated as to include the surrounding

isolated believers and Bahá'í groups. It may even be necessary in some remote areas to have subunits in which there are no Local Spiritual Assemblies.

- The body to be responsible for organizing a unit convention or subunit meeting or for establishing and supervising a polling station. This could be a centrally located, firmly established Local Spiritual Assembly or a committee.
- The day or days on which the elections should take place. Elections could be carried out in different subunits on different days, extended over a reasonable period of time, if this is felt to be desirable.
- The manner in which ballots are to be cast, collected, counted, and consolidated with other ballots from the same unit.
- Procedures to be followed in consultation, if the procedure chosen allows for consultation.
- A method for monitoring the balloting to ensure that proper Bahá'í procedures are followed, that the ballots are safeguarded, and that a Bahá'í voter cannot cast more than one ballot.
- The procedure for holding a second ballot should there be a tie vote for the delegate.
- The means for announcing to the friends in all units the names of their elected delegates.

It is the hope of The Universal House of Justice that the implementation of these instructions this year and thereafter will promote Bahá'í solidarity, broaden the basis of representation at the National Conventions and that thereby the work of the Faith in each country will be characterized by greater efficiency and enhanced harmony.

As this further step in the onward march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is taken, you are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Holy Shrines that you will be granted vision and wisdom to carry out your task and be enabled to extend the range of your dedicated services to His Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

5 August 1985

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its letter of 23 January 1985 concerning the International Year of Peace, The Universal House of Justice urged Bahá'í communities to reach out to the non-Bahá'í public by finding ways of discussing the important issues of peace with others. One way to make such discussions relevant and effective is for the friends to know and acknowledge and pay just tribute to persons whose lives were dedicated to peaceful means of bettering social conditions.

One such person was the black American Martin Luther King, Jr., whose promotion of nonviolent means of achieving racial equality in the United States cost him his life. The positive effects of his heroic efforts brought encouragement to downtrodden peoples throughout the world and earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Four years later he was assassinated. His aspirations for a society in which the races can live in harmony are perhaps best expressed in the famous speech he delivered at a gathering of some 250,000 people in the capital of the United States in 1963. A copy is enclosed.

The House of Justice has asked us to call your attention to Dr. King for these reasons. His widow, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, a non-Bahá'í, has written to the House of Justice that a national public holiday has been officially designated in the United States in honor of Dr. King. She intends to make an appeal that on 20 January 1986, the first observance of this holiday, "nations and liberation movements all over the world cease all violent actions, seek amnesty and reconciliation both within and outside of their national boundaries, and encourage all of their citizens to recommit themselves to work for international peace, universal justice and the elimination of hunger and poverty in the world." The House of Justice feels that Mrs. King has a noble intention to which the friends can lend their moral and spiritual support. Since the date on which action is desired falls within the International Year of Peace, Spiritual Assemblies may consider holding peace conferences on 20 January, or close to that date, and naturally include in the presentations at these conferences references to the life and work of Dr. King. An alternative might be to devote the Bahá'í programs on World Religion Day, 19 January, to peace and on these occasions pay tribute to Dr. King.

The thought of the House of Justice in suggesting such action is not to promote the holiday for Dr. King, and it does not expect Bahá'í communities everywhere to commemorate his life annually; rather, it wishes to

indicate to the friends a legitimate occasion, as illustrated by Mrs. King's plan, when the Bahá'í peace activities can be associated with the worthy activities of others.

We are to assure you of the continuing prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that your energetic efforts to further the cause of peace throughout the earth may be richly confirmed by the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

7 August 1985

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

This letter and the annexed memorandum of comments are addressed primarily to those National Spiritual Assemblies whose communities include large numbers of materially poor people but inasmuch as the principles expressed, as distinct from some of the procedures suggested, are of universal application, they are being sent to all National Assemblies.

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose—he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meager, to the work of the Faith.

Giving to the Fund, therefore, is a spiritual privilege not open to those who have not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty. This is an aspect of the Cause which, we feel, is an essential part of the basic teaching and deepening of new believers. The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.

To reemphasize the spiritual significance of contributing to the Faith by all members of the Bahá'í community, we quote the following extract from a letter of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central and East Africa dated 8 August 1957:

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 Center of His Covenant, will exert. A sustained and strenuous effort must henceforth be made by the rank and file of the avowed upholders of the Faith ...

We assure you of our prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance and confirmation as you labor to develop this aspect of Bahá'í life in your communities.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

### Development of the Local and National Funds of the Faith Some Comments and Suggestions

While the friends have the sacred obligation and privilege to contribute to the Fund, each Local and National Assembly also has the inescapable duty of educating itself and the believers in the spiritual principles related to Bahá'í contributions, to devise simple methods to facilitate the flow and receipt of contributions, and to formulate effective procedures to ensure the wise expenditure of the funds of the Faith. The following comments and suggestions have been compiled at the request of The Universal House of Justice and are being shared with National Spiritual Assemblies to assist them in these important tasks.

A primary requisite for all who have responsibility for the care of the funds of the Faith is trustworthiness. This, as Bahá'u'lláh has stressed, is one of the most basic and vital of all human virtues, and its exercise has a direct and profound influence on the willingness of the believers to contribute to the Fund.

Conditions vary from country to country and, therefore, in educating the believers and developing the Fund, each National Spiritual Assembly needs to tailor its actions to the conditions of its area of jurisdiction.

In many parts of the world gifts of produce and handicrafts may be a large potential source of regular donations and could well be encouraged, proper arrangements being made for their collection and sale and the disposition of the proceeds.

Pledges can be useful as a means of encouraging contributions and of bringing the financial needs of the Cause to the attention of the friends. This method can be particularly helpful in a situation where a Spiritual Assembly has a major task to perform, such as the building of a Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds or the establishment of a tutorial school, and needs to have some idea in advance of whether the funds for the project will be available. However, it would be entirely contrary to Bahá'í principles to bring any pressure to bear when calling for pledges or when endeavoring to collect them. Once a pledge has been given it is permissible to remind the donor, privately, of his expressed intention to contribute and to inquire courteously if it would be possible for him to honor his pledge, but Assemblies must be aware that such pledges are not an obligation in any legal sense; their redemption is entirely a matter of conscience. Lists of those making pledges must not be publicized.

The beloved Guardian has explained that the general and national interests of the Cause take precedence over local ones; thus contributions to local funds are secondary to those to national funds. However, the stability of the National Assembly rests on the firmness of the Local Spiritual Assemblies, and in the matter of educating the friends in the importance of the Fund, it is often most practical and efficacious to concentrate at first on the development of the local funds and the efficient operation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Then, once the friends understand the principle and learn from experience at a local level, they



will the more easily understand the importance of the national fund and the work of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Regarding the local funds, it is suggested that until such time as the friends have developed the habit of contributing regularly and freely, any Local Spiritual Assembly which has a large community might appoint a small committee to assist the local treasurer in the discharge of his responsibilities. Such committees could be appointed after consultation with the Auxiliary Board member or assistant for the area. Great care must be taken in the appointment of the members of the committees; they must be both trustworthy and conscientious and must be imbued with awareness of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of contributions to the funds. It is envisaged that these Treasury Committees would serve a number of functions:

- To render general assistance to the treasurer, as needed; for example, members of the committee could assist with issuing receipts or keeping accounts.
- To arrange for inspirational talks and discussions at Nineteen Day Feasts or at specially called meetings for the education of the friends in the spiritual and practical importance of contributing to the funds.
- To receive donations of money on behalf of the local treasurer and transmit these to him.
- To receive gifts of produce and handicrafts. The committee would be responsible for arranging for their sale and for handing over the proceeds to the local treasurer.
- To receive from the friends written pledges of their hope or intention of making a contribution to the local or national funds, whether in cash or in kind, and to assist in collecting them.

As to the national fund, in those areas where there are problems as a result of lack of banking facilities, unreliable mail systems and general difficulties of communication, it would be desirable for the National Spiritual Assembly to appoint a national committee to assist the national treasurer in a manner similar to that outlined above for Local Spiritual Assemblies. Further, it may even be necessary to subsidize, from the national fund, one or more trusted individuals, depending on the size of the national community, who would travel to rural areas to meet with the local Treasury Committees, assist them in the execution of their functions, explain the needs of the national fund, collect the donations to the national fund from the local areas and transmit them to the national treasurer.

In considering the above suggestions and their applicability to its national community, each National Assembly should also bear in mind the following points:

- It may find it valuable to study the methods being used already in those rural areas where notable success has been achieved in bringing about participation in sacrifice and giving.
- Voluntary service for the Faith could also be stressed. It has an effect on the Fund by reducing the cost of carrying out the work of the Faith, and should be undertaken with joy by the friends.
- It can be useful and helpful for both National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to make plans for financial self-sufficiency, set goals for levels of contributions, and share the news of progress towards such goals.
- Assemblies should take the members of their communities into their confidence and regularly inform them of the uses to which the Fund is put and the projects for which money is needed.
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- The Universal House of Justice

19 September 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

AFTER FEW MONTHS' CESSATION OF EXECUTIONS OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN, GRIEVED ANNOUNCE TWO FURTHER EXECUTIONS. VALIANT SOULS ARE MR. 'ABBÁS AYDILKHÁNÍ AND MR. RAḤMATU'LLÁH VUJDÁNÍ. FORMER WAS EXECUTED ON 1 AUGUST IN PRISON WITHOUT ANY NOTIFICATION HIS FAMILY. HIS GRAVE WAS ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED NEAR TEHRAN. HE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED ON 26 APRIL 1982 IN ZANJÁN WHERE HE REMAINED UNTIL APRIL 1985 WHEN HE WAS TAKEN TO TEHRAN. HE WAS 45 YEARS OLD AND WAS AN AIR-CONDITIONING TECHNICIAN. MANNER HIS EXECUTION STILL UNKNOWN. HIS WIFE IS ALSO IN PRISON IN ZANJÁN.

MR. RAḤMATU'LLÁH VUJDÁNÍ WAS ARRESTED IN JULY 1984 IN BANDAR-'ABBÁS, WHERE HE WAS EXECUTED BY FIRING SQUAD ON 28 AUGUST 1985. HE WAS 57 YEARS OLD. HIS BODY WAS DELIVERED, AND HIS FUNERAL TOOK PLACE IN PRESENCE HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS. HE WAS A TEACHER BY PROFESSION.

FROM THE END JANUARY TO SEPTEMBER 1985, 63 BAHÁ'ÍS WERE ARRESTED AND 39 RELEASED. TOTAL NUMBER PRISONERS NOW 741. THIS FIGURE INCLUDES 39 PRISONERS RELEASED DURING PERIOD. BAHÁ'Í STUDENTS OF ALL LEVELS HAVE TO COMPLETE ADMISSION FORMS WHICH INCLUDE SPACE FOR ONLY FOUR OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED RELIGIONS. BAHÁ'Í STUDENTS WHO STATE THEY ARE BAHÁ'ÍS ARE DENIED SCHOOLING OR IF ADMITTED FACE TREMENDOUS PRESSURE AND HARASSMENT. OTHER FORMS PERSECUTION INNOCENT BAHÁ'ÍS PERSIST....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

October 1985

## To the Peoples of the World

The Great Peace towards which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of mankind.”

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity’s stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.

Among the favorable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women’s and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.

The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another.

It is out of a deep sense of spiritual and moral duty that we are impelled at this opportune moment to invite your attention to the penetrating insights first communicated to the rulers of mankind more than a century ago by Bahá’u’lláh, Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, of which we are the Trustees.

"The winds of despair," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective." This prophetic judgment has been amply confirmed by the common experience of humanity. Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcise the specter of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behavior is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.

With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.

As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind's historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man's true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and conflict.

To choose such a course is not to deny humanity's past but to understand it. The Bahá'í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes

towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the “potentialities inherent in the station of man” and reveal “the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality.”

## I

The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life are summed up in what is known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments have enabled humanity to build civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have never satisfied the human spirit, whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind’s capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress.

No serious attempt to set human affairs aright, to achieve world peace, can ignore religion. Man’s perception and practice of it are largely the stuff of history. An eminent historian described religion as a “faculty of human nature.” That the perversion of this faculty has contributed to much of the confusion in society and the conflicts in and between individuals can hardly be denied. But neither can any fair-minded observer discount the preponderating influence exerted by religion on the vital expressions of civilization. Furthermore, its indispensability to social order has repeatedly been demonstrated by its direct effect on laws and morality.

Writing of religion as a social force, Bahá’u’lláh said: “Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein.” Referring to the eclipse or corruption of religion, he wrote: “Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine.” In an enumeration of such consequences the Bahá’í writings point out that the “perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished.”

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion—a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion. For from a fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social

milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.

The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate.

Had humanity seen the Educators of its collective childhood in their true character, as agents of one civilizing process, it would no doubt have reaped incalculably greater benefits from the cumulative effects of their successive missions. This, alas, it failed to do.

The resurgence of fanatical religious fervor occurring in many lands cannot be regarded as more than a dying convulsion. The very nature of the violent and disruptive phenomena associated with it testifies to the spiritual bankruptcy it represents. Indeed, one of the strangest and saddest features of the current outbreak of religious fanaticism is the extent to which, in each case, it is undermining not only the spiritual values which are conducive to the unity of mankind but also those unique moral victories won by the particular religion it purports to serve.

However vital a force religion has been in the history of mankind, and however dramatic the current resurgence of militant religious fanaticism, religion and religious institutions have, for many decades, been viewed by increasing numbers of people as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world. In its place they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or to the following of man-made ideologies designed to rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans. All too many of these ideologies, alas, instead of embracing the concept of the oneness of mankind and promoting the increase of concord among different peoples, have tended to deify the state, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.

How tragic is the record of the substitute faiths that the worldly-wise of our age have created. In the massive disillusionment of entire populations who have been taught to worship at their altars can be read history's irreversible verdict on their value. The fruits these doctrines have produced, after decades of an increasingly unrestrained exercise of power by those who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them, are the social and economic ills that blight every region of our world in the closing years of the twentieth century. Underlying all these outward afflictions is the spiritual damage reflected in the apathy that has gripped the mass of the peoples of all nations and by the extinction of hope in the hearts of deprived and anguished millions.

The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the “new world” promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? Why is the vast majority of the world’s peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?

Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.

That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet. The intolerable conditions pervading society bespeak a common failure of all, a circumstance which tends to incite rather than relieve the entrenchment on every side. Clearly, a common remedial effort is urgently required. It is primarily a matter of attitude. Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?

Those who care for the future of the human race may well ponder this advice. “If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.”

## II

Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of the peace process, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Nor can the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity be resolved through the settlement of specific conflicts or disagreements among nations. A genuine universal framework must be adopted.



Certainly, there is no lack of recognition by national leaders of the worldwide character of the problem, which is self-evident in the mounting issues that confront them daily. And there are the accumulating studies and solutions proposed by many concerned and enlightened groups as well as by agencies of the United Nations, to remove any possibility of ignorance as to the challenging requirements to be met. There is, however, a paralysis of will; and it is this that must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with. This paralysis is rooted, as we have stated, in a deep-seated conviction of the inevitable quarrelsomeness of mankind, which has led to the reluctance to entertain the possibility of subordinating national self-interest to the requirements of world order, and in an unwillingness to face courageously the far-reaching implications of establishing a united world authority. It is also traceable to the incapacity of largely ignorant and subjugated masses to articulate their desire for a new order in which they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity with all humanity.

The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.

The increasing attention being focused on some of the most deep-rooted problems of the planet is yet another hopeful sign. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the United Nations, the more than two score declarations and conventions adopted by that organization, even where governments have not been enthusiastic in their commitment, have given ordinary people a sense of a new lease on life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the similar measures concerned with eliminating all forms of discrimination based on race, sex or religious belief; upholding the rights of the child; protecting all persons against being subjected to torture; eradicating hunger and malnutrition; using scientific and technological progress in the interest of peace and the benefit of mankind—all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the specter of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations. There is no need to stress the significance of the issues addressed by these declarations and conventions. However, a few such issues, because of their immediate relevance to establishing world peace, deserve additional comment.

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution

calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh's statement is: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased.

Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers. How are the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfill this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.

A fundamental lack of communication between peoples seriously undermines efforts towards world peace. Adopting an international auxiliary language would go far to resolve this problem and necessitates the most urgent attention.

Two points bear emphasizing in all these issues. One is that the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera. The other point is that the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found.

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.

### III

The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict, can change to a world in which harmony and cooperation will prevail.

World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice—prejudice of every kind—race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.

In the Bahá'í view, recognition of the oneness of mankind "calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

Elaborating the implications of this pivotal principle, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, commented in 1931 that: "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity."

The achievement of such ends requires several stages in the adjustment of national political attitudes, which now verge on anarchy in the absence of clearly defined laws or universally accepted and enforceable principles regulating the relationships between nations. The League of Nations, the United Nations, and the many organizations and agreements produced by them have unquestionably been helpful in attenuating some of the negative effects of international conflicts, but they have shown themselves incapable of preventing war. Indeed, there have been scores of wars since the end of the Second World War; many are yet raging.

The predominant aspects of this problem had already emerged in the nineteenth century when Bahá'u'lláh first advanced his proposals for the establishment of world peace. The principle of collective security was propounded by him in statements addressed to the rulers of the world. Shoghi Effendi commented on his meaning: "What else could these weighty words signify," he wrote, "if they did not point to the inevitable curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty as an indispensable preliminary to the formation of the future Commonwealth of all the nations of the world? Some form of a world superstate must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration.

"... A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive

intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship—such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age.”

The implementation of these far-reaching measures was indicated by Bahá'u'lláh: “The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world’s Great Peace amongst men.”

The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another—all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process. Bahá'u'lláh insistently drew attention to the virtues and indispensability of consultation for ordering human affairs. He said: “Consultation bestows greater awareness and transmutes conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leads the way and guides. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.” The very attempt to achieve peace through the consultative action he proposed can release such a salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final, triumphal outcome.

Concerning the proceedings for this world gathering, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and authorized interpreter of his teachings, offered these insights: “They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at

its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.”

The holding of this mighty convocation is long overdue.

With all the ardor of our hearts, we appeal to the leaders of all nations to seize this opportune moment and take irreversible steps to convoke this world meeting. All the forces of history impel the human race towards this act which will mark for all time the dawn of its long-awaited maturity.

Will not the United Nations, with the full support of its membership, rise to the high purposes of such a crowning event?

Let men and women, youth and children everywhere recognize the eternal merit of this imperative action for all peoples and lift up their voices in willing assent. Indeed, let it be this generation that inaugurates this glorious stage in the evolution of social life on the planet.

#### IV

The source of the optimism we feel is a vision transcending the cessation of war and the creation of agencies of international cooperation. Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity. Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence, beyond even the many experiments in cooperation which these steps will make possible lies the crowning goal: the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family.

Disunity is a danger that the nations and peoples of the earth can no longer endure; the consequences are too terrible to contemplate, too obvious to require any demonstration. “The well-being of mankind,” Bahá'u'lláh wrote more than a century ago, “its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” In observing that “mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its agelong martyrdom,” Shoghi Effendi further commented that: “Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.”

All contemporary forces of change validate this view. The proofs can be discerned in the many examples already cited of the favorable signs towards world peace in current international movements and developments. The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture, race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the United Nations, represent a planetary “civil service” whose impressive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of cooperation that can be attained even under

discouraging conditions. An urge towards unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to express itself through countless international congresses that bring together people from a vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the remarkable movement towards ecumenism by which members of historically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.

The experience of the Bahá'í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some three to four million people drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder's vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Bahá'í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

In contemplating the supreme importance of the task now challenging the entire world, we bow our heads in humility before the awesome majesty of the divine Creator, who out of His infinite love has created all humanity from the same stock; exalted the gemlike reality of man; honored it with intellect and wisdom, nobility and immortality; and conferred upon man the "unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him," a capacity that "must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation."

We hold firmly the conviction that all human beings have been created "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization"; that "to act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man"; that the virtues that befit human dignity are trustworthiness, forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all peoples. We reaffirm the belief that the "potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God." These are the motivations for our unshakable faith that unity and peace are the attainable goal towards which humanity is striving.

At this writing, the expectant voices of Bahá'ís can be heard despite the persecution they still endure in the land in which their Faith was born. By their example of steadfast hope, they bear witness to the belief that the imminent realization of this age-old dream of peace is now, by virtue of the transforming effects of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, invested with the force of divine authority. Thus we convey to you not only a vision in words: we summon the power of deeds of faith and sacrifice; we convey the anxious plea of our coreligionists everywhere for peace and unity. We join with all who are the victims of aggression, all who yearn for an end to conflict and contention, all whose devotion to principles of peace and world order promotes the ennobling purposes for which humanity was called into being by an all-loving Creator.

In the earnestness of our desire to impart to you the fervor of our hope and the depth of our confidence, we cite the emphatic promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



24 October 1985

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It gives us great happiness to announce the membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors as from the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1985. The number of Counselors has been increased from 63 to 72 and adjustments have been made in their geographical distribution in consonance with the development of the Faith around the world.

The membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors as now appointed is:

**AFRICA (18 Counselors):** Mr. Hushang Ahdieh (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Ḥusayn Ardekání, Mrs. Beatrice O. Asare, Mr. Gila Michael Bahta, Mr. Friday Ekpe, Mr. Oloro Epyeru, Mr. Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, Mr. Kassimi Fofana, Mr. Zekrullah Kazemi, Mr. Muḥammad Kebdani, Mrs. Thelma Khelghati, Mr. Roddy Dharma Lutchmaya, Mr. Daniel Ramoroesi, Dr. Mihdí Samandarí, Mrs. Edith Senoga, Mr. Peter Vuyiya, Mrs. Lucretia Mancho Warren, Mr. Mabuku Wingi.

**THE AMERICAS (17 Counselors):** Dr. Hidáyatu'lláh Aḥmadíyyih, Mr. Eloy Anello, Dr. Farzam Arbáb (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Dr. Wilma Brady, Mrs. Isabel P. de Calderón, Mr. Rolf von Czekus, Mr. Robert Harris, Mrs. Lauretta King, Dr. Peter McLaren, Mr. Shapoor Monadjem, Mrs. Ruth Pringle, Mr. Donald O. Rogers, Mr. Fred Schechter, Dr. Arturo Serrano, Mr. Alan Smith, Dr. David R. Smith, Mr. Rodrigo Tomás.

**ASIA (19 Counselors):** Dr. Šábir Áfáqí, Mr. Burhání'd-Dín Afshín, Dr. Iraj Ayman, Mr. Bijan Fareed, Dr. John Fozdar, Mr. Ṣabíḥu'lláh Gulmuḥammadí, Mr. Bharat Koirala, Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Mumtází, Mr. S. Nagaratnam, Dr. Perin Olyai, Mrs. Rose Ong, Mr. Khudáraḥm Paymán (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Masíḥ Rawḥání, Mr. Vicente Samaniego, Dr. İlhan Sezgin, U Soe Tin, Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, Dr. Chellie J. Sundram, Mr. Michitoshi Zenimoto.

**AUSTRALASIA (9 Counselors):** Mr. Suhayl 'Alá'í, Mr. Ben Ayala, Justice Richard Benson, Dr. Kamran Eshraghian, Mrs. Tinai Hancock, Mr. Lisiata Maka, Mrs. Gayle Morrison, Dr. Sírús Naráqí, Mrs. Joy Stevenson (Trustee of the Continental Fund).

**EUROPE (9 Counselors):** Dr. Agnes Ghaznavi, Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Mr. Louis Hénuzet (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mrs. Ursula Mühlischlegel, Dr. Leo Niederreiter, Mrs. Polin Rafat, Mr. Adib Taherzadeh, Mr. Adam Thorne, Mr. Sohrab Youssefian.

The following nineteen devoted believers who are now being relieved of the onerous duties of membership on the Boards of Counselors, will, as distinguished servants of the Cause, continue through their outstanding capacities and experience to be sources of stimulation and encouragement to the friends.

Mr. A. Owen Battrick, Mr. Erik Blumenthal, Mrs. Shirin Boman, Mrs. Carmen de Burafato, Mr. Athos Costas, Mr. Angus Cowan, Mrs. Dorothy Ferraby, Mr. Aydin Güney, Dr. Dipchand Khianra, Mr. Artemus Lamb, Mr. Kolonario Oule, Dr. Sarah Pereira, Mrs. Betty R. Reed, Dr. Manúchihr Salmánpúr, Mrs. Velma Sherrill, Mr. Hideya Suzuki, Mrs. Bahíyyih Winckler, Mr. Donald Witzel, Mr. Yan Kee Leong.

We express to each and every one of these dear friends our heartfelt gratitude and assure them of our prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of their highly meritorious and self-sacrificing services to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

At this time when the Bahá'í world is facing the challenge of the International Year of Peace, on the point of completing the Seven Year Plan and standing on the threshold of a new Six Year Plan, we have felt it important to call upon the Counselors from all the continents to gather at the World Center for a conference to deliberate on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately ahead. This conference will take place from 27 December 1985 through 2 January 1986 and is yet one more sign of the rapid advance and consolidation of the institutions of the Cause of God.

We are profoundly grateful to the Blessed Perfection for His bountiful confirmations which are enabling His strenuously laboring servants in every part of the world to witness the growing influence of His glorious Cause, and to take part in the vitalizing unfoldment of His Administrative Order.

It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land will arise with increased determination and self-abnegation to mirror forth the standards upheld by His potent Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

17 December 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH JOYFUL GRATEFUL HEARTS WE ACCLAIM UNPRECEDENTED RECOGNITION BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY THROUGH ADOPTION BY UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF RESOLUTION MAKING SPECIFIC REFERENCE PERSECUTED FRIENDS IRAN. FOR FIRST TIME NAME PRECIOUS FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH MENTIONED HIGHEST MOST WIDELY REPRESENTATIVE INTERNATIONAL FORUM YET ESTABLISHED THUS FULFILLING LONG-CHERISHED WISH BELOVED GUARDIAN. SIGNIFICANCE THIS MOMENTOUS DEVELOPMENT ALSO UNDERScoreD BY FACT THAT ONLY IN THREE INSTANCES BEFORE HAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ITSELF ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS CENSURING PARTICULAR COUNTRIES FOR BAD HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS. PROCESS WHICH RESULTED SUCH A REMARKABLE OUTCOME BEGAN TWO YEARS AGO WITH DECISION UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO SEND REPRESENTATIVE IRAN INVESTIGATE VIOLATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS INCLUDING THOSE DIRECTLY AFFECTING BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. THE COMMISSION DETERRED IN ITS INTENTION BY IRANIAN AUTHORITIES REFERRED ISSUE TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY WHERE MATTER WAS DISCUSSED FIRST IN THIRD COMMITTEE WHEN INTERESTS FAITH WERE VIGOROUSLY UPHELD BY REPRESENTATIVES VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND RESOLUTION WAS PROPOSED AND THEN IN PLENARY SESSION WHICH RATIFIED RESOLUTION ON 13 DECEMBER. NOTABLE CONSEQUENCE IS RETENTION ISSUE AGENDA GENERAL ASSEMBLY THUS PERMITTING INTENSIFICATION EFFORTS RELIEVE SITUATION SUFFERING BELIEVERS IRAN IN ANTICIPATION DAY COMPLETE EMANCIPATION FAITH GOD THAT LAND. WARMLY COMMEND ACKNOWLEDGE UNTIRING EFFORTS UNITED NATIONS REPRESENTATIVES BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY RESOLUTELY SUPPORTED BY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES ALL CONTINENTS.

OCCURRING IN CONJUNCTION WITH PRESENTATION PEACE STATEMENT BY AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚHÍYYIH KHÁNUM TO SECRETARY-GENERAL UNITED NATIONS ONLY FEW WEEKS BEFORE, WITH ONGOING DELIVERY SAME STATEMENT TO HEADS STATE THROUGHOUT WORLD AND WITH UNEQUIVOCAL PUBLIC DEFENSE IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS BY PRESIDENT UNITED STATES AT HUMAN RIGHTS DAY CEREMONY, THIS INESTIMABLE ACHIEVEMENT DEFINITELY AFFIRMS EMERGENCE FAITH OBSCURITY HERALDS NEW PHASE IRREPRESSIBLE UNFOLDMENT DIVINELY APPOINTED WORLD ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

27 December 1985

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

Beloved Friends,

With all the warmth of our hearts we welcome you to this historic Conference, to discuss the challenges and opportunities so swiftly devolving upon the struggling Faith of God.

The main features of this spiritually potent occasion are evident. Your entry upon your new term of office as the Seven Year Plan approaches its conclusion, with the measures to be taken to ensure its success heavy on your shoulders; consideration of the main features of the new Six Year Plan which will terminate on the eve of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh; the golden opportunities offered by the Year of Peace, which must be seized and fully exploited; the dramatic emergence of the Faith from obscurity into the limelight of the world's highest councils, with the attendant enhancement of its status; a tremendous upsurge of zealous activity in the Bahá'í world community as it takes to its heart the recently issued Statement on Peace; the deep and universal commitment already made by that community to a vast variety of social and economic development programs; the widespread and growing awareness among the leaders of mankind that a new stage in human history has opened and that the guidance of the past will not carry it through the emergencies of the present; these, together with the invitation extended to the peoples of the world to examine the Bahá'í community as a working model for the reorganization of the world, are some of the pressures forcing themselves upon the attention of those responsible for the direction, propagation and protection of the Cause of God.

Who can doubt that we are now entering a period of unprecedented and unimaginable developments in the onward march of the Faith? Some intimation of what these may be can already be deduced and preparations made to deal with them. We know that the present victories will lead to active opposition, for which the Bahá'í world community must be prepared. We know the prime needs of the Cause at the moment: a vast expansion of its numbers and financial resources; a greater consolidation of its community life and the authority of its institutions; an observable increase in those characteristics of loving unity, stability of family life, freedom from prejudice and rectitude of conduct which must distinguish the Bahá'ís from the spiritually lost and wayward multitudes around them. Surely the time cannot be long delayed when we must deal universally with that entry by troops foretold by the Master as a prelude to mass conversion. How are we to prepare ourselves for that examination of the Bahá'í experience which will undoubtedly be made by shrewd and doubting questioners?

These are some of the subjects before you. The role of the Counselors is all-pervading and vital in the life of the Cause. You must be wise and steadfast, encouraging and brotherly in all your associations with the

believers and in your consultation with National Spiritual Assemblies; through your Board members and their assistants you must strengthen and uplift the Local Spiritual Assemblies and rouse the spirits and enlarge the vision of the believers everywhere. Your prayers in the Sacred Shrines during these few days will strengthen and guide you; be assured of our own prayers for a bountiful outpouring of grace and inspiration as you embark upon the deliberations which will enable you to discharge your sacred and historic duties.

We wish you a happy, exciting and fruitful conference.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

2 January 1986

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The eager expectation with which we welcomed to the World Center, on 27 December, sixty-four Counselors from the five continents to discuss, with the International Teaching Centre, the challenges and opportunities facing the Bahá'í world community, has, at the conclusion of their historic conference, been transmuted into feelings of deepest joy, gratitude and love.

Graced by the presence of the Hands of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánun, Ugo Giachery, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá and Collis Featherstone, the Conference was organized and managed with admirable foresight and efficiency by the International Teaching Centre, whose individual members watched over and served untiringly the needs of the participants and the progress of the Conference itself.

Convened in the concourse of the Seat of The Universal House of Justice as the Counselors of the Bahá'í world entered upon their new five-year term of office, within months of the termination of the Seven Year Plan and the opening of the new Six Year Plan, its aura heightened by the spiritual potencies of the Holy Shrines and the euphoric sense of victory and blessing now pervading the entire Bahá'í world, the Conference attained such heights of consultative exaltation, spirituality and power as only those serving the Blessed Beauty can enjoy.

The organic growth of the Cause of God, indicated by recent significant developments in its life, becomes markedly apparent in the light of the main objectives and expectations of the Six Year Plan: a vast expansion of the numerical and financial resources of the Cause; enlargement of its status in the world; a worldwide increase in the production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature; a firmer and worldwide demonstration of the Bahá'í way of life requiring special consideration of the Bahá'í education of children and youth, the strengthening of Bahá'í family life and attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual life; further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities and a dynamic consolidation of the unity of the two arms of the Administrative Order; an extension of the involvement of the Bahá'í world community in the needs of the world around it; and the pursuit of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities. These are some of the features of the Six Year Plan which will open on 21 April 1986 and terminate on 20 April 1992.

Riḍván 1992 will mark the inception of a Holy Year, during which the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh will be observed by commemorations around the world and the inauguration of His Covenant will be celebrated, in the City of the Covenant, by the holding of the second Bahá'í World Congress.

The beloved Counselors, strengthened and enriched by their experience in the Holy Land, will, as early as possible, consult with all National Spiritual Assemblies on measures to conclude triumphantly the current Plan, and on preparations to launch the Six Year Plan. In anticipation of those consultations, National Spiritual Assemblies will receive the full announcement of the aims and characteristics of that Plan, so that together with the Counselors they may formulate the national plans which will, for each community, establish its pursuit of the overall objectives.

This new process, whereby the national goals of the next Plan are to be largely formulated by National Spiritual Assemblies and Boards of Counselors, signalizes the inauguration of a new stage in the unfoldment of the Administrative Order. Our beloved Guardian anticipated a succession of epochs during the Formative Age of the Faith; have no hesitation in recognizing that this new development in the maturation of Bahá'í institutions marks the inception of the fourth epoch of that Age.

Shoghi Effendi perceived in the organic life of the Cause a dialectic of victory and crisis. The unprecedented triumphs, generated by the adamantine steadfastness of the Iranian friends, will inevitably provoke opposition to test and increase our strength. Let every Bahá'í in the world be assured that whatever may befall this growing Faith of God is but incontrovertible evidence of the loving care with which the King of Glory and His martyred Herald, through the incomparable Center of His Covenant and our beloved Guardian, are preparing His humble followers for ultimate and magnificent triumph. Our loving prayers are with you all.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

5 January 1986

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has directed us to transmit the following in reply to your letter dated 19 December 1985.

Concerning your request for material relating to the role of women in society and in the establishment of peace, a compilation of extracts from the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice, is enclosed. These extracts concern the equality of women, their role, and, either directly or indirectly, their importance to the attainment of peace.

Additionally, from one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's previously untranslated Tablets, the following extract is taken:

The handmaidens of God and the bondswomen in His divine Court should reveal such attributes and attitudes amongst the women of the world as would cause them to stand out and achieve renown in the circles of women. That is, they should associate with them with supreme chastity and steadfast decency, with unshakable faith, articulate speech, an eloquent tongue, irrefutable testimony and high resolve. Beseech God that thou mayest attain unto all these bounties.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also stated:

The woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work. Look at the vegetable and the animal worlds. The palm which carries the fruit is the tree most prized by the date grower. The Arab knows that for a long journey the mare has the longest wind. For her greater strength and fierceness, the lioness is more feared by the hunter than the lion.

...The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis....

*(Abdu'l-Bahá in London, pp. 102–03)*

Consider, for instance, a mother who has tenderly reared a son for twenty years to the age of maturity. Surely she will not consent to having that son torn asunder and killed in the field of battle. Therefore,



as woman advances toward the degree of man in power and privilege, with the right of vote and control in human government, most assuredly war will cease; for woman is naturally the most devoted and staunch advocate of international peace.

(*Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 375)

A further extract about women and peace is taken from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian on 24 March 1945:

What 'Abdu'l-Bahá meant about the women arising for peace is that this is a matter which vitally affects women, and when they form a conscious and overwhelming mass of public opinion against war there can be no war. The Bahá'í women are already organized through being members of the Faith and the Administrative Order. No further organization is needed. But they should, through teaching and through the active moral support they give to every movement directed towards peace, seek to exert a strong influence on other women's minds in regard to this essential matter.

With reference to the membership of the House of Justice being possible only for men, a compilation on this subject is also enclosed. The following extracts are contained in this compilation, but have been selected for separate mention. The first is from *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, section 38:

The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

And from a letter dated 14 April 1975 written on behalf of the House of Justice to an individual believer, are taken these extracts:

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to assure you that it appreciates the deep concern you express in your recent letter about the membership of The Universal House of Justice being confined to men, and it understands your feeling of frustration at not being able to find an answer that would help you to accept that this is not an injustice being imposed on womankind. The House of Justice agrees with you that our Sacred Writings are replete with passages affirming the equality of both sexes; that from the spiritual point of view, there is no difference between women and men. In fact, many statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá extol women. He has said that "in some respects woman is superior to man." ...

The Universal House of Justice points out that when we accept the Manifestation of God for our time, we must accept what He says though at the moment we may not comprehend the meaning of some of His statements. Some things, such as Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings regarding life after death, we have to accept on faith.

May you be guided and sustained in promoting the Word of God at the meetings you are planning and in the opportunities that occur in your daily life.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



Department of the Secretariat

5 February 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the letter dated 2 January 1986 written by The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, reference was made to the inception of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. In response to questions subsequently put to the House of Justice about the periods related to the earlier epochs of that Age, the Research Department was requested to prepare a statement on the subject. This has now been presented, and a copy is enclosed.

Kindly share this material of topical interest with the friends, as you deem fit, so that it may be studied in their deepening classes, summer schools, conferences and similar gatherings.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Epochs of the Formative Age**

**Prepared by the Research Department of  
The Universal House of Justice**

**Introduction:**

In disclosing the panoramic vision of the unfoldment of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi refers to three major evolutionary stages through which the Faith must pass—the Apostolic or Heroic Age (1844–1921) associated with the Central Figures of the Faith; the Formative or Transitional Age (1921–), the “hallmark” of which is the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, based on the execution of the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament; and, the Golden Age which will represent the “consummation of this glorious Dispensation.” Close examination of the details of Bahá'í history reveals that the individual Ages are comprised of a number of periods—inseparable parts of one integrated whole.

In relation to the Heroic Age of our Faith, the Guardian, in a letter dated 5 June 1947 to the American Bahá'ís, specified that this Age consisted of three epochs and described the distinguishing features of each:

... the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years' duration, associated respectively with the Bábí Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This primitive Age of the Bahá'í Era, unapproached in spiritual fecundity by any period associated with the mission of the Founder of any previous Dispensation, was impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind.

The Formative Age, in which we now live and serve, was ushered in with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Its major thrust is the shaping, development and consolidation of the local, national and international institutions of the Faith. It is clear from the enumeration of the tasks associated with the Formative Age that their achievement will require increasingly mature levels of functioning of the Bahá'í community:

During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of present and succeeding epochs, the last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the election of The Universal House of Justice—will have been completed, the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” the Mother Book of His Revelation, will have been codified and its laws promulgated, the Lesser Peace will have been established, the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained, the Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá will have been executed, the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected, and its independent religious status will have been universally recognized, ...

The epochs of the Formative Age mark progressive stages in the evolution of the organic Bahá'í community and signal the maturation of its institutions, thus enabling the Faith to operate at new levels and to initiate new functions. The timing of each epoch is designated by the Head of the Faith, and given the organic nature of evolutionary development, the transition from one epoch to another may not be abrupt, but may well occur over a period of time. This is the case, for example, in relation to both the inception of the Formative Age and the end of its first epoch. In relation to the former, the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the transitional event most often identified with the close of the Heroic Age and the beginning of the Formative Age. However, the Guardian also asserts that the Apostolic Age of the Faith concluded “more particularly with the passing [in 1932] of His well-beloved and illustrious sister, the Most Exalted Leaf—the last survivor of a glorious and heroic age.” With regard to the termination of the first epoch of the Formative Age, Shoghi Effendi has placed this between the years 1944 and 1946.

Before describing the individual epochs of the Formative Age, it is important to comment on the use of the term “epoch” in the writings of the Guardian. In a letter dated 18 January 1953, written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly, it is explained that the term is used to apply both to the stages in the Formative Age of the Faith, and to the phases in the unfoldment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. We are currently in the fourth—epoch of the Formative Age and the second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.

(The first epoch of the Divine Plan began in 1937, with the inception of the First Seven Year Plan of the North American Bahá'í community, and concluded with the successful completion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963. The second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan commenced in 1964 with the inauguration of the Nine Year Plan of The Universal House of Justice.)

The primary focus of this statement is on the epochs of the Formative Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

### **The First Epoch of the Formative Age: 1921–1944/46**

The first epoch of this Age witnessed the “birth and the primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith.” The epoch was characterized by concentration on the formation of local and national institutions in all five continents, thereby initiating the erection of the machinery necessary for future systematic teaching activities. This epoch was further marked by the launching, at the instigation of the Guardian, of the First Seven Year Plan (1937–1944) by the American Bahá'í community. This Plan, drawing its inspiration from the Tablets of the Divine Plan, represented the first systematic teaching campaign of the Bahá'í community and inaugurated the initial stage of the execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan in the Western Hemisphere.

### **The Second Epoch of the Formative Age: 1946–1963**

This epoch extended the developments of the first epoch by calling for the “consummation of a laboriously constructed Administrative Order,” and was to witness the formulation of a succession of teaching plans designed to facilitate the development of the Faith beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere and the continent of Europe. This epoch was distinguished, in the first instance, by the simultaneous and often spontaneous prosecution of Bahá'í national plans in both the East and the West. For example, in a letter written at Naw-Rúz 105 [1949] to the Bahá'ís in the East, the beloved Guardian listed the specific plans undertaken by the United States, British, Indian, Persian, Australian and New Zealand, and Iraqi National Spiritual Assemblies, and indicated that this concerted action signaled the transition into the second epoch of the Formative Age. The internal consolidation and the administrative experience gained by the National Assemblies was utilized and mobilized by the Guardian with the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade—a crusade involving the simultaneous prosecution of twelve national plans. The plans derived their direction from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, and the goals were assigned by Shoghi Effendi from the World Center of the Faith. A second distinguishing feature of this epoch was the “RISE” and “STEADY CONSOLIDATION” of the World Center of the Faith.

The second epoch thus clearly demonstrated the further maturation of the institutions of the Administrative Order. It witnessed the appointment of the Hands of the Cause, the introduction of Auxiliary Boards, and the establishment of the International Bahá'í Council. The culminating event of the epoch was the election of The Universal House of Justice in 1963. It further demonstrated the more effective and coordinated use of the administrative machinery to prosecute the goals of the first global spiritual crusade, and the emergence in ever sharper relief of the World Center of the Faith.

### **The Third Epoch of the Formative Age: 1963–1986**

In addressing the British National Spiritual Assembly in 1951, the Guardian foreshadowed “worldwide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same [Formative] Age, by The Universal House of Justice.” In announcing the Nine Year Plan, “the second of those world-encircling enterprises destined in the course of time to carry the Word of God to every human soul,” The Universal House of Justice embarked upon the process anticipated by the Guardian and proclaimed the commencement of the third epoch of the Formative Age, an epoch which called the Bahá’ís to a yet more mature level of administrative functioning, consistent with the expected vast increase in the size and diversity of the community, its emergence as a model to mankind, and the extension of the influence of the Faith in the world at large. The House of Justice, in a letter dated October 1963, stated:

Beloved friends, the Cause of God, guarded and nurtured since its inception by God’s Messengers, by the Center of His Covenant and by His Sign on earth, now enters a new epoch, the third of the Formative Age. It must now grow rapidly in size, increase its spiritual cohesion and executive ability, develop its institutions and extend its influence into all strata of society. We, its members, must, by constant study of the life-giving Word, and by dedicated service, deepen in spiritual understanding and show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices and distractions of present day society.

The period of the third epoch encompassed three world plans, involving all National Spiritual Assemblies, under the direction of The Universal House of Justice, namely, the Nine Year Plan (1964–1973), the Five Year Plan (1974–1979), and the Seven Year Plan (1979–1986). This third epoch witnessed the emergence of the Faith from obscurity and the initiation of activities designed to foster the social and economic development of communities. The institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors was brought into existence leading to the establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Assistants to the Auxiliary Boards were also introduced. At the World Center of the Faith, the historic construction and occupation of the Seat of The Universal House of Justice was a crowning event.

### **The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age: 1986–**

In a letter dated 2 January 1986 written by The Universal House of Justice to The Bahá’ís of the World, the Supreme Body announced the inception of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. It highlighted the significant developments that had taken place in the “organic growth of the Cause of God” during the course of the recently completed third epoch, by assessing the readiness of the Bahá’í community to begin to address the objectives of the new Six Year Plan scheduled to begin on 21 April 1986, and, outlined the general aims and characteristics of this new Plan. Whereas national plans had previously derived largely from the World Center, in this new epoch the specific goals for each national community will be formulated, within the framework of the overall objectives of the Plan, by means of consultation between the particular National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Board of Counselors. As The Universal House of Justice states:

This new process ... signalizes the inauguration of a new stage in the unfoldment of the Administrative Order. Our beloved Guardian anticipated a succession of epochs during the Formative Age of the Faith; we have no hesitation in recognizing that this new development in the maturation of Bahá'í institutions marks the inception of the fourth epoch of that Age.

### **Future Epochs**

The tasks that remain to be accomplished during the course of the Formative Age are many and challenging. Additional epochs can be anticipated, each marking significant stages in the evolution of the Administrative Order and culminating in the Golden Age of the Faith. The Golden Age, itself, will involve "successive epochs" leading ultimately to the establishment of the Most Great Peace, to the World Bahá'í Commonwealth and to the "birth and efflorescence of a world civilization."

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

25 February 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

### **The Six Year Plan**

On 2 January 1986, on the closing day of the Counselors' Conference, The Universal House of Justice announced certain features of the Six Year Plan and the methods by which they national goals were to be worked out in consultation between the Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. Before Ridván you will receive a message from The Universal House of Justice to the entire Bahá'í world and also one addressed specifically to the Bahá'ís within the jurisdiction of each National Spiritual Assembly.

In the meantime the House of Justice wishes you to begin your consultations on the goals of the Six Year Plan for your country. The preliminary steps in goal-setting have already been taken, namely the assessment of each country's strengths and weaknesses which the National Spiritual Assemblies recently made at the request of The Universal House of Justice, and which will undoubtedly be of great assistance to each one of you as you enter the next stage of the process.

The House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following additional guidelines together with the enclosed statement of the major objectives of the plan at the national level, which includes some suggestions for specific goals to provide a basis for your consultations. You should not, however, confine yourselves to those suggestions.

A special characteristic of the Six Year Plan is that the conceiving of the detailed national goals is itself to be one of the tasks of the Plan, but this fact should not hold up in any way the activities of your communities. With this letter you are being acquainted with the major objectives of the plan and every believer, every Local Spiritual Assembly, and all the national committees can pursue immediately, with increasing vigor, many projects towards their attainment, both projects already in process and others which will be newly conceived, so that when the specific national goals for each community are announced they will be received by a united company of devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh already in the full flood of activity.

It is the hope of The Universal House of Justice that each National Assembly will be able to meet before Ridván with a representative of the Continental Board of Counselors so that from this initial consultation a



basis will be laid for consultation on the goals at the National Conventions.

Other consultations will no doubt continue following the Rīdván Festival. Their duration will depend on the condition of each national community, its size and the complexity of its circumstances. As soon as specific goals have been formulated and agreed they should be immediately sent to the World Center. They will then be considered by The Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre, and, as soon as possible, the National Assembly will be informed of the approval or modification of its proposal. Each submission will be considered on its arrival; the earlier they arrive the better, and in no case should a submission reach the World Center later than 1 November 1986.

Among the elements of the plan which are not covered by the list of major objectives are the goals for international assistance including pioneering, resident teaching projects, traveling teaching, assistance for development projects, and for the acquisition of properties and vehicles. Notes relating to these elements have been provided to the Continental Boards of Counselors who will share them with National Assemblies during the process of consultation. Since they are international in nature, these goals will have to be consolidated and approved at the World Center before being generally announced.

Though the institutions of the Faith are responsible for planning the goals and activities of the Cause, for stimulating and encouraging the believers to arise, and for supporting and unifying them in their services, it is, in the final analysis, through the spiritual decisions and actions of the individual believers that the Faith moves forward on its course to ultimate victory. It is the ardent hope of The Universal House of Justice that every faithful follower of Bahá'u'lláh will search his or her heart and turn with full attention and loving self-sacrifice to the consideration of the goals of the Six Year Plan, and determine how to play a part in their achievement.

The prayers of The Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre at the Sacred Threshold will surround the institutions of the Faith in every continent and nation as you assume your weighty task of conceiving the goals which will guide the national communities of the Faith through the next six years.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Six Year Plan**

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The Major Objectives

The major objectives of the Six Year Plan include: carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind; greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society; a worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature; further acceleration in the process

of the maturation of national and local Bahá'í communities; greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers; a wider extension of Bahá'í education to children and youth and the strengthening of Bahá'í family life; and the pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities.

\* \* \*

*Set out below are suggestions for possible ways of achieving the above objectives to act as a basis for consultation and a stimulus for thinking. National Assemblies should not confine themselves to these points if they feel that there are other matters which deserve attention.*

### **1. Carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind**

- Increase the number of believers from all strata of society, identifying as goals of the plan those specific sectors, minority groups, tribal peoples, etc. which are at present underrepresented in the Bahá'í community and which will, therefore, be given special attention during the plan.
- Increase the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside, opening, in the process, virgin states, provinces, islands or other major civil subdivisions of the country.
- Seize teaching opportunities by planning projects in areas where receptivity is found, aiming at large-scale enrollment and entry by troops where possible.
- Be alert to opportunities for international collaboration with other Bahá'í communities in the promotion of the Faith through: border teaching projects; the sending of traveling teachers; and the teaching of special groups such as those temporarily abroad for study or work, particularly those from countries which are difficult of access, such as China or countries in Eastern Europe.
- Raise up homefront pioneers and traveling or resident teachers to assist in the fulfillment of teaching goals and plans.
- Utilize mass media systems for greater proclamation.
- Make use of drama and singing in the teaching and deepening work and in Bahá'í gatherings, where advisable.

## **2. Greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society**

- Develop the proper understanding and practice of consultation among members of the Bahá'í community and in the work of Bahá'í institutions, and foster the spirit of consultation in the conduct of human affairs and the resolution of conflicts at all levels of society.
- Foster association with organizations, prominent persons and those in authority concerning the promotion of peace, world order and allied objectives, with a view to offering the Bahá'í teachings and insights regarding current problems and thought.
- Train suitable Bahá'ís to undertake public relations activities.
- Foster appreciation of the Faith in scholarly and academic circles by developing Bahá'í scholarship, by endeavoring to have the Faith included in the curricula and textbooks of schools and universities, and by other means.
- Encourage Bahá'í youth to move towards the front ranks of those professions, trades, arts and crafts necessary to human progress.
- Promote the establishment of Bahá'í clubs in universities and other similar educational institutions.
- Foster the practice of the equality of the sexes both in the life of the Bahá'í community and in society as a whole and, for this purpose, hold special conferences and training programs for women and for men.

## **3. A worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature**

- Foster the use of Bahá'í literature, especially in local languages, supplemented as need be by tape recordings and visual aids.
- Improve the distribution of Bahá'í literature by taking specific steps, such as the establishment of regional depots where necessary, and the education of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the responsibilities to acquaint the friends with Bahá'í literature and ensure its easy availability.
- Produce greater supplies of Bahá'í literature in accordance with well-thought-out plans of translation, production and distribution.
- Produce, where required for translations into vernacular languages, simplified versions of the Sacred Scriptures, the writings of the Guardian and the statements of The Universal House of Justice.
- Establish Bahá'í lending libraries.

#### **4. Further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities**

- Adopt specific programs to assist and encourage the development of isolated enters into groups, and groups into communities with Local Spiritual Assemblies, resulting in a steady increase of such Assemblies.
- Adopt specific goals and programs to consolidate and strengthen Local Spiritual Assemblies, so that they will:
  - Hold regular meetings with harmonious and productive consultation,
  - Properly organize and conduct the work of their Secretariat and Treasury,
  - Appoint and coordinate the work of local committees for special aspects of their work, such as teaching, child education, youth activities, literature distribution, etc.,
  - Win the respect and confidence of their local communities so that the believers will turn to them for the resolution of problems and advice in their services to the Cause,
  - Where appropriate, acquire and develop the use of local centers,

- Obtain incorporation or equivalent recognition as a legal entity,
- Exercise their responsibilities in relation to marriages, births, transfers of membership, marriages and deaths.

- Adopt specific goals and programs to consolidate communities with Local Spiritual Assemblies so that the believers will be encouraged to:

- Attend regularly Nineteen Day Feasts and the observances of Bahá'í Holy Days, and enhance the spiritual quality of such gatherings,
- Pursue local teaching and deepening activities,
- Foster the realization of the equality of men and women,
- Develop local activities for children and youth,
- Support the fund,
- Carry out extension teaching projects.

- Develop the functioning of National Spiritual Assemblies, adopting specific plans and programs to:

- Improve their standard of united, productive, loving consultation,
- Develop efficiently functioning national secretariats,
- Enhance the standard of the functioning of national treasuries and promote the goal of financial independence of the national Bahá'í community,
- Appoint strong national committees to carry out, under the general supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly, the many specialized aspects of the work of the Cause, including the detailed planning and prompt execution of the work necessary to achieve all the goals of the Six Year Plan.

- Acquire, where needed and feasible, national and local properties, such as Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds, teaching institutes, summer schools, Bahá'í cemeteries, etc. and ensure their proper care and maintenance.
- Obtain, where legally possible, official recognition for Bahá'í marriage and holy days and exemption from the payment of taxes on Bahá'í institutions and their activities.
- Ensure the rapid and regular dissemination of news to all believers.
- Hold regular, well-planned and well-run summer and winter schools and conferences at costs and in localities which will permit the largest attendance.
- Encourage collaboration between or amongst Local Spiritual Assemblies in mutually agreed projects.
- Develop and administer correspondence courses for teaching and deepening.

#### **5. Greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers**

- Promote universal participation in the life of the Faith and an increased sense of their Bahá'í identity among children, youth and adults.
- Encourage, where feasible, the practice of dawn prayer.
- Encourage individual believers to adopt teaching goals for themselves.
- Carry out activities designed to deepen the believers in both a spiritual and intellectual understanding of the Cause.
- Encourage believers to make greater use of Bahá'í literature.
- Encourage the believers to enhance their command of language to assist them to understand the Bahá'í writings ever more clearly.
- Develop and foster Bahá'í scholarship and lend support to the Associations for Bahá'í Studies.

- Foster obedience to the Bahá'í laws of personal behavior such as abstention from the drinking of alcoholic beverages and from the taking of habit-forming drugs, and inspire the believers to follow the Bahá'í way of life.

#### **6. A wider extension of Bahá'í education to children and youth, and the strengthening of Bahá'í family life**

- Encourage the holding of regular classes for the Bahá'í education of children.
- Develop systematic lesson plans and other materials for the Bahá'í education of children.
- Train believers to teach Bahá'í children's classes.
- Establish a program for the guidance of parents, especially mothers, in the care and training of Bahá'í children.
- Sponsor institutes on Bahá'í marriage and family life.
- Encourage community activities involving Bahá'í families.

#### **7. The pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities**

- Encourage Local Spiritual Assemblies and the rank and file of the believers to consider ways in which they can advance the social and economic development of their communities.
- Establish tutorial schools and preschools where needed and feasible.
- Encourage and sponsor adult literacy programs where needed, especially for women.

- Foster collaboration with other agencies involved in social and economic development in areas where the Bahá'í communities can contribute to the work.
-



- The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

17 March 1986

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 4 March 1986 seeking clarification of a statement concerning certain obligations of women found in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. We are directed to convey the following.

There is nothing in the teachings of the Faith to state that women in their courses are exempt from fasting and from offering the obligatory prayers because they are unclean.

The concept of uncleanness as understood and practiced in the religious communities of the past has been abolished by Bahá'u'lláh. As you are aware, He says that through His revelation "all created things were immersed in the sea of purification" (*God Passes By*, page 154). This should, of course, be understood in the context of His clear instructions about the necessity for all to exemplify immaculate cleanliness, especially when engaged in acts of worship.

We are to confirm that you are quite right in pointing out that the term used in this regard in the *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is "exemption," not prohibition.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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 Counselors; 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 focused on the Cause, eventually bringing it to the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and, together with worldwide 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 cooperation between the twin arms of the Administrative Order. This process now takes a large stride forward as the National Spiritual Assemblies and Counselors 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 Center 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 Ḥuqúqu'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 Counselors 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

12 May 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH HEAVY HEARTS ANNOUNCE MARTYRDOM THREE VALIANT SOULS IRANIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. MR. SIRRU'LLÁH VAḤDAT-NIḤÁMÍ WAS EXECUTED BY HANGING 4 MAY 1986 IN TEHRAN. HE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED SINCE 13 FEBRUARY 1984. MR. FIDRUS SHABRUKH, 38, WAS EXECUTED BY HANGING 9 MAY 1986 IN ZÁHIDÁN. HE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED FOR A SECOND TIME SINCE 26 SEPTEMBER 1983. BOTH THESE FRIENDS HAD BEEN SEVERELY TORTURED MUCH OF THEIR TIME IN PRISON.

THE THIRD VICTIM, FIFTEEN YEAR OLD PAYMÁN SUBHÁNÍ WAS TAKEN TOGETHER WITH HIS FATHER RÚḤU'L-AMÍN SUBHÁNÍ BY A GROUP OF FANATICS ENCOURAGED BY OFFICIAL RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS, TO THE MOUNTAINS, WHERE THEY WERE BEATEN AND STONED. BOTH WERE PRESUMED DEAD AND THROWN OVER A CLIFF. ACCIDENTALLY A VEHICLE STRAYED INTO THE AREA AND FOUND THEM. THE FATHER, BARELY ALIVE, WAS TAKEN TO A HOSPITAL IN TEHRAN WHERE HE IS STILL IN SERIOUS CONDITION. THE SON, PAYMÁN WAS DEAD.

THESE CRIMES AFTER RELATIVE QUIET PERIOD IN IRAN HAVE CAUSED CONCERN SAFETY, WELL-BEING IRANIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

25 May 1986

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Beloved Friends,

The Six Year Plan has been launched and national Bahá'í communities throughout the world are engaged in formulating their national goals. On the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1986, a new term of five years will begin for those appointed to the Auxiliary Boards. In preparation for that event, we find it propitious to announce the following decisions.

As from last Rıdván, Turkey has been transferred from the area of responsibility of the Continental Board of Counselors in Asia to that of the Continental Board of Counselors in Europe. Counselor İlhan Sezgin is, therefore, a member of the European Board of Counselors. It has also been decided to increase the size of the European Auxiliary Board for the Protection of the Faith to 36 members, which is the same as the number currently authorized for the Propagation Board in that continent.

In view of the growth of the Bahá'í community and its emergence from obscurity, we have decided to make the following further changes in the number of members of the Auxiliary Boards, to be effective from 26 November 1986:

|                 | Present<br>Number | Number<br>Added | New<br>Number |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Africa</b>   |                   |                 |               |
| Protection      | 81                | 9               | 90            |
| Propagation     | 99                | 9               | 108           |
| <b>Americas</b> |                   |                 |               |
| Protection      | 54                | 9               | 63            |

|             |     |   |     |
|-------------|-----|---|-----|
| Propagation | 117 | 0 | 117 |
|-------------|-----|---|-----|

### Asia

|            |    |   |    |
|------------|----|---|----|
| Protection | 99 | 0 | 99 |
|------------|----|---|----|

|             |     |   |     |
|-------------|-----|---|-----|
| Propagation | 117 | 9 | 126 |
|-------------|-----|---|-----|

### Australasia

|            |    |   |    |
|------------|----|---|----|
| Protection | 27 | 9 | 36 |
|------------|----|---|----|

|             |    |   |    |
|-------------|----|---|----|
| Propagation | 36 | 9 | 45 |
|-------------|----|---|----|

### Europe

|            |    |   |    |
|------------|----|---|----|
| Protection | 36 | 0 | 36 |
|------------|----|---|----|

|             |    |   |    |
|-------------|----|---|----|
| Propagation | 36 | 0 | 36 |
|-------------|----|---|----|

|              |            |           |            |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>702</b> | <b>54</b> | <b>756</b> |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|

|                         |            |           |            |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Total Protection</b> | <b>297</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>324</b> |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|

|                          |            |           |            |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Total Propagation</b> | <b>405</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>432</b> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|

This further expansion of the institution of the Auxiliary Boards reflects the recent increase of the number of Continental Counselors from sixty three to seventy two and is required by the marked growth in the size of Bahá'í communities, a growth which it is confidently expected will accelerate during the Six Year Plan as the impact of the Faith's emergence from obscurity begins to make itself evident in a growing interest in its teachings by people in all walks of life.

It will also assist the vital development in maturity and experience of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, a process which must synchronize with the further development of the World Center of the Faith and the advance of mankind towards the attainment of the lesser peace. Who can tell what challenges these burgeoning divine institutions will have to face in the years immediately ahead—years which may well see the realization of mankind's gravest fears and the appearance of the fulfillment of its highest hopes.

Our prayers at the Sacred Threshold are offered on behalf of every faithful follower of the Blessed Beauty who is laboring for the promotion of His Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

12 October 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The above statement which was sent to you with our covering letter of 21 February 1986 has been revised by the Office of Public Information and approved by The Universal House of Justice. At the direction of the House of Justice, we enclose a copy of the revised statement, which supersedes the previous one.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Apartheid: A Bahá'í View

A little more than a hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, declared that mankind was entering upon a new era in its history when accelerating processes of unification would soon compel universal recognition that humanity is one single race, one distinct species. He appealed to the peoples of the world to accept this central truth and to set aside the barriers of race, nationality, and culture which have been principal causes of war throughout history. There is, He said, no possibility of achievement of world peace until the fundamental principle of unity has been accepted and given practical effect in the organization of society.

Consequently, from the time of its inception more than a century ago, the Bahá'í world community has been characterized by the integration of the many religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and national elements which it comprises. Marriage between persons of different ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and particularly between black and white Bahá'ís, is warmly encouraged in the Bahá'í scriptures. In order to make certain that those members who suffer discrimination in society as a whole are not prevented from full participation in the life of the community, the Bahá'í teachings contain certain administrative principles which are designed to overcome the handicaps created by social inequalities. For example, where a tie vote has been cast in a Bahá'í community election or where two or more believers are equally qualified for a



particular office, priority is given as a matter of principle to the one representing the disadvantaged or oppressed sector of society.

It is these principles which have guided the Bahá'ís in South Africa since the opening years of this century. When the apartheid laws made it illegal for certain local groups, including elected Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies, to contain members from different racial backgrounds, it was the white Bahá'ís who surrendered the privilege of elected membership so that the principle of giving priority to disadvantaged segments of society could continue to prevail. Except for these local decision-making bodies whose membership was explicitly limited by civil law, Bahá'í meetings in South Africa have been racially integrated, a fact well known to the civil authorities.

Beyond attempting to provide an encouraging example of racial integration, the Bahá'í community in South Africa has devoted much of its energy to the inculcation of Bahá'í principles related to the oneness of mankind and on the development of a sense of self-worth and of social responsibility in the individual. Parallel with these activities has been a program aimed at training Spiritual Assemblies in principles of consultation and problem-solving. Bahá'ís are particularly proud of the results of this effort because through it black believers have assumed the highest elective and appointive offices in the community.

This historical background points up the Bahá'í conviction that solutions to situations such as that which prevails in South Africa must draw on the force of example. Fundamental changes in social attitude will be most readily achieved if the relevant spiritual and moral principles are courageously set forth and if men and women of good will can see others attempting successfully to give these ideals practical expression in individual and community life.

Violating as it does the very honor of humanity, the system of apartheid arouses in peoples of all nations and cultures deep feelings of abhorrence. Bahá'ís share these feelings particularly keenly. The moral challenge which the situation represents, however, has now become intertwined with partisan political concerns. So complete is this interrelationship that the issues in the conflict are inextricable from one another: social protest originating in moral outrage has assumed the character of political action.

It is natural that it should do so, given the adversary principle that characterizes our political traditions throughout the world. But political action, in the absence of conditions for genuine consultation, in which partisan interests are subordinated to the interests of the whole, will not itself bring an enduring resolution of problems as serious as those convulsing South Africa. However difficult the task and however disheartening the present situation may seem, segments of South African society who believe full integration to be the fundamental issue face the challenge of focusing their efforts on creating such conditions. This is a moral imperative as urgent as any other motivating peoples of good will who seek to free South Africa from its terrible burden.

Bahá'ís are required by the teachings of their Faith to refrain from involvement in partisan political activity and civil disorder. This is true whether such activity is a response to racial oppression, as is generally the case in South Africa, or to more widespread attempts to keep people divided and vulnerable such as the

persecution of religious belief, the suppression of women, or the denial of political freedom. The hard-won experience of Bahá'ís under all these conditions convinces them beyond any doubt that humanity can learn to live as one family and that all the forces of contemporary history are rapidly impelling the race in this direction. The pressure of these forces is inescapable; eventually even South Africa will respond. The quality of that response, and its speed, will depend as much on spiritual and moral conditions as it will on economic and political ones.

## The Universal House of Justice

### Department of the Secretariat

27 October 1986

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your very thought-provoking letter of 24 June 1986 has been the subject of considerable research, and The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following reply.

The crucial task before you in relation to your two little daughters would seem to be to foster their confidence in and love for God, their acceptance of His Will and their assurance of the validity of the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women. In working towards this there are certain facts of history and principle in the Faith that you need to accept and reconcile.

You raise two basic issues, that all the Manifestations of God known to us have been men, and that they have appeared in the East.

'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself in a talk given in Malden, Massachusetts, confirms that "The East has ever been the dawning point of the Sun of Reality. All the Prophets of God have appeared there. The religions of God have been promulgated, the teachings of God have been spread, and the law of God founded in the East. The Orient has always been the center of lights." (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 289) Indeed, one can see that the Prophets of God named in the Scriptures have appeared, not just in the East, but in a very limited area of the East, stretching from the Levant and Egypt across Iran as far as India. We have no authenticated records of Chinese or Japanese Prophets. However, to complement this we must remember that the Founders of the Great Religions are but one of the kinds of prophet, and we should study the following Qur'anic statements:

And every nation had an apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.

(Surah 10, verse 47)

And certainly We raised in every nation an apostle saying: Serve God and shun the devil...

(Surah 16, verse 36)

And on the day when We will raise up a witness out of every nation, then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall they be made to solicit favor.

(Surah 16, verse 84)

... And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.

(Surah 35, verse 24)

There are Prophets mentioned in the Qur'án, such as Húd and Šáliḥ, about whom the Bible is silent. Idrís, whom the Qur'án states was a Prophet, is identified with Hermes by Bahá'u'lláh, Who states "In every tongue he hath a special name." It is clear that He must have lived in very ancient times. Bahá'u'lláh made no mention of Buddha, and if it had not been for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement we would not have been in a position to state definitely that Buddha had been a Manifestation of God. There are a myriad traditions in the legends of peoples that point back to some sort of divine revelation but, as the beloved Guardian's secretary pointed out on his behalf in a letter written to an individual believer on 13 March 1950, "... We cannot possibly add names of people we (or anyone else) think might be Lesser Prophets to those found in the Qur'án, the Bible and our own Scriptures. For only these can we consider authentic Books." We must just accept that there are undoubtedly many prophetic figures of whom all authentic record has been lost. As to the future, the Research Department knows of no Text which states explicitly in which country Manifestations of God will appear.

The reason for the appearance of a Manifestation of God in a given place is not to honor a particular people or nation. Shoghi Effendi indicates a quite different reason in *The Advent of Divine Justice* and, more concisely, in a letter to an individual written on his behalf on 23 January 1944:

The ever-recurring miracle in the establishment of every religion is that such poor instruments accomplish the work of God. It is to demonstrate the fact that God is the power that overcomes every obstacle, and that Revelations are divine in origin, that leads Him to always choose the worst people among whom to manifest His Messenger and the most obscure and helpless of the population—relatively speaking—to establish the foundations of His Faith. The Bahá'í Dispensation is no exception to this rule, as you yourself have observed.

Beyond these points is the fact that God, the Almighty Creator, does not have to justify His choice of a race or nationality from which to raise up a Manifestation. As all sacred scriptures tell us, He does as He wills and shall not be asked of His doing, and we bow in humility before Him. Besides, as you must know, conceptions of race, nation, oriental, occidental, and the like reflect earthly limitations and are not qualifications attached to the reality of the soul in the limitless realms of God.

Regarding your desire to assist your daughters to overcome their perceptions of the unequal status of women, you are perhaps not aware of the compilation on women recently released To National Spiritual Assemblies. Through the divine insights and instructions provided in this compilation, you can inspire your

daughters with knowledge of the glorious station to which women are called in the Age of Bahá'u'lláh, and imbue them with assurance in the promises of the Blessed Beauty, so that through constant endeavor they may become as brilliant stars radiating a spirit of freedom from the stultifying notions of the past. On the particular question of the relationship between womanhood and prophethood, it is hoped that the following comments will be of help.

Even though there have been outstanding women such as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fáṭimih, Ṭáhirih and the Greatest Holy Leaf in every Dispensation, it is an incontrovertible fact that all Manifestations of God known to us have been men. Moreover, it is a clear provision in Bahá'í administration that the Guardians were to be men and that membership on The Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Whether these facts point to a differentiation in function that is unalterable, or whether it was merely a characteristic of a period which will change when mankind attains its maturity is a matter that will, no doubt, become clear in the future. The important point for Bahá'ís to remember is that, in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, even these facts are no evidence at all of the superiority of the male over the female sex. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that equality does not mean identity of function. He has also stated that the few areas in which men and women are not equal are "negligible."

We must also remember that sex is a characteristic of this world, not of the spiritual world. When the Guardian was asked about "soul mates" and the problem that could arise in the next world if one were to remarry in this life, his secretary replied on his behalf, on 4 December 1954:

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that "soul mates" exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

The House of Justice hopes that these remarks will help to ease some of your perplexity and will assist you and your dear wife to raise your daughters as devoted and knowledgeable Bahá'ís, confident of the validity of the principles promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh. Surely as they meet problems and questions and face them fearlessly, their understanding of the Cause of God will deepen and this will increase their ability to deal with the difficulties of life.

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that ... and ... may be the recipients of God's constant benediction and that their parents may be divinely assisted to protect and train them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



29 October 1986

To the meeting of the Senior Officers of the United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information

THE GATHERING IN NEW YORK ON 31 OCTOBER OF THE SENIOR STAFF OF THE OVERSEAS OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MARKS A NEW, POTENT STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE WORLDWIDE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. THIS STAGE BETOKENS THE PROMINENCE ATTAINED BY THE CAUSE OF GOD IN ITS EMERGENCE FROM OBSCURITY AND IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE NEW, INESCAPABLE CHALLENGES IMMEDIATELY TO BE MET AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE OPERATION OF THE ONRUSHING PROCESSES THROUGH WHICH ARE EVOLVING THE RECONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S WORLD ORDER. A STRIKING MANIFESTATION OF THE NEW SITUATION CAN BE SEEN IN THE ACCUMULATING EVIDENCE OF THE SALUTARY RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPING BETWEEN THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD AT LARGE. THIS RELATIONSHIP MUST BE EXPANDED. AS WINDOWS OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD, THESE OFFICES MUST DISPLAY EVER MORE CLEARLY THE UNIFYING PRINCIPLES, THE HOPE, THE PROMISE, THE MAJESTY OF THIS EMERGING ORDER.

A GLANCE BACKWARD TO THE EMBRYONIC EFFORTS 39 YEARS AGO TO ASSOCIATE THE INTERESTS OF THE FAITH WITH THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS CANNOT BUT AROUSE IN EVERY OBSERVANT BAHÁ'Í A DEEP SENSE OF PRIDE AND WONDERMENT AT THE MOMENTOUS PROGRESS ACHIEVED. THE FOUNDATION OF EIGHT NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES ON WHICH THOSE EFFORTS WERE LAUNCHED HAS, BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 148 NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES, BROADENED NEARLY NINETEENFOLD. FROM THAT SMALL BEGINNING TO THE HISTORIC MOMENT IN 1970 WHEN THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WAS ACCORDED CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, FOLLOWED BY A SIMILAR ACCREDITATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND IN 1976, TO THE REMARKABLE OCCASION IN DECEMBER 1985 WHEN THE NAME OF THE FAITH WAS RECORDED IN A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ITSELF, THE WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH HAS SURELY JUSTIFIED ITS PROMISE TO COME FORTH AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN THE CLOSING YEARS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

YOU HAVE WITNESSED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND THE CREATION OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNIT IN THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE, AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE GENEVA BRANCH OF THAT OFFICE WITH THE TRANSFER FROM NEW YORK OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS UNIT.... THESE ORGANIZATIONAL INITIATIVES AND REFINEMENTS BESPEAK AN ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES POSED BY THE FAR-REACHING DIPLOMATIC AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PROSPECTS OPENING BEFORE THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMUNITY.

CLARITY AND UNITY OF VISION BETWEEN THE OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST BE ACHIEVED. A HIGHER LEVEL OF COOPERATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE OFFICES IS IMPERATIVE. EQUALLY ESSENTIAL IS A GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S PROGRAMS AND OBJECTIVES BY PERTINENT INSTRUMENTS OF THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, PARTICULARLY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES, WHOSE GROWING GOOD RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENTS AND INCREASING CONTACTS WITH PROMINENT ELEMENTS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES OFFER A WIDE FIELD OF ACTIVITY TO BE CHERISHED AND ENCOURAGED ON THE ONE HAND, AND EXPLORED AND EXPLOITED ON THE OTHER, BY THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION. FOSTERING A HARMONIOUSLY FUNCTIONING NETWORK COMPRISING THE VARIOUS ENTITIES OF A MATURING, FAR-FLUNG BAHÁ'Í SYSTEM—INDEED, THE WISE, SKILLFUL, STRATEGIC COLLABORATION OF THESE ENTITIES IN PROGRAMS BEING PURSUED BY THESE OFFICES CAN CONDUCE TO A DEPLOYMENT OF BAHÁ'Í INFLUENCE NOT YET EXPERIENCED.

YOUR AIM NOW IS TO VALIDATE SUCH PROSPECTS THROUGH LOVING, UNITED, EFFICIENT, SELFLESS, AND CEASELESS ENDEAVOR. DIFFICULTIES OF THE PAST MUST YIELD TO THE URGENT DEMANDS OF THE PRESENT; INCONGRUITIES OF PERSONALITY MUST DISSOLVE IN A WIDENING RANGE OF EFFECTIVE ACTIONS; ALL PARTICULARISMS MUST BE SUBORDINATED TO THE COMMON GOOD OF THE CAUSE. ONLY THUS CAN SUCCESS BE ASSURED.

IT IS WITH A COMMITMENT TO SUCH RESOLVES THAT YOU WILL NOT ONLY MEET AMONG YOURSELVES AS COWORKERS IN THE OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, BUT ALSO INVITE THE PARTICIPATION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, WHICH WERE AMONG THE EIGHT NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES WHICH CONFIGURED THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS AN ENTITY IN THE EYES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, WITH THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THE SPEARHEAD. THESE REPRESENTATIVES WILL COME FROM COMMUNITIES WHICH CONSTITUTE A BULWARK OF HARD-WON BAHÁ'Í EXPERIENCE, RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION, AND WHICH, AS IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED, SHOULDER EXTRAORDINARY RESPONSIBILITIES BY VIRTUE OF THE UNIQUE BLESSINGS BESTOWED ON NORTH AMERICA THROUGH 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S DIVINE PLAN. SUCH BLESSINGS WILL IN GOD'S APPOINTED TIME MAKE EVIDENT THE PREPONDERATING INFLUENCE WHICH THAT CONTINENT MUST AND WILL EXERT ON THE REALIZATION OF PEACE ON EARTH. AS THE RISE IN THE STATUS OF THE AMERICAN AND CANADIAN COMMUNITIES ALSO SIGNIFIES TO A GREAT EXTENT A RISE IN THE STATUS OF THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMUNITY, IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT THE COLLABORATION OF THEIR NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES WITH THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION SHOULD BE WELCOMED, REAPPRAISED AND REINFORCED. THEY WILL IN TURN, NO DOUBT, EXTEND TO THOSE OFFICES EAGER HANDS OF SUPPORT AND THE WHOLEHEARTED WILL TO COOPERATE, AS MUCH WITH THE OFFICES AS BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE, CONFIDENT THAT BY WORKING UNITEDLY TOGETHER, AND WITH DUE APPRECIATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE ASSIGNED TO THE ADMINISTRATOR-GENERAL, YOU



WILL MAKE A NOTABLE CONTRIBUTION TO A PERIOD OF UNPRECEDENTED ADVANCEMENT FOR THE FAITH OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. WITH THIS ASSURANCE WE OFFER OUR SUPPLICATIONS AT THE HOLY SHRINES THAT HE WHO WATCHES OVER THE DESTINY OF HIS WONDROUS CAUSE AND CONFIRMS THE HUMBLE EFFORTS OF HIS DEVOTED SERVANTS MAY GRANT YOU A FRESH MEASURE OF HIS GRACE AND BOUNTY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

6 November 1986

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 28 September to The Universal House of Justice has been received, and we are asked to convey its answer to your questions concerning Bahá'ís celebrating Christmas.

Questions concerning the observance of Christmas by Bahá'ís were asked of the beloved Guardian, and two extracts from letters written on his behalf will be of assistance to your understanding of the Bahá'í position.

The Bahá'ís should give up the celebrating of Christian Holy Days such as Christmas. The same applies to Bahá'ís of Jewish and Moslem extraction etc. However, this is not a thing for the Spiritual Assemblies to enforce now; but each one should conscientiously begin to do this—otherwise, people will never know we are members of a new religion, but will think we are just people believing two or three things at the same time.

(15 August 1957)

As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers; it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festal gatherings of this nature instead during the Intercalary Days and Naw-Rúz.

(19 March 1938)

It is important to note, in the second extract, the phrase “in their relation to each other”; it is clear, therefore, that among the members of the Bahá'í community the celebrations of former religious dispensations should be abandoned. However, Bahá'ís are encouraged to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship,” and there is no harm in Bahá'ís sharing Christmas with Christian relatives or friends. Indeed, families may contain both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, and the participation by Bahá'ís at celebrations of Christmas or of other religious observances, should not be made into a source of conflict but rather be used as an opportunity for demonstrating the honor due to other religions and also as an incentive for developing the celebration of Bahá'í Holy Days and anniversaries.

The House of Justice understands the problems of individuals and families who have come into the community and who require loving support through their transition to a new way of life, new Holy Days, and ways of celebrating the events of the new Dispensation. Prayers will be offered for your own guidance in this situation, which must not become a source of difficulty in the community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

26 November 1986

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The International Teaching Centre has referred to The Universal House of Justice your letter of 29 September 1986 in which you seek comment on the draft of the letter you plan to send to the Local Spiritual Assembly of ... for the guidance of ... , a believer who has written an article entitled, "The Infallibility of the Prophets."

The House of Justice has studied your draft response and ...'s paper in which he concludes, by means of logical analysis, based in part on his understanding of an article by Mr. Juan Ricardo Cole on the Tablet of Wisdom, that Bahá'u'lláh, and indeed all the Prophets of God, are not infallible.... expresses the opinion that attempts to resolve apparent contradictions in the Writings by seeking a broader context only serve to create insoluble logical difficulties, and he indicates that he is aware that the Institutions of the Faith may not agree with his views causing his status as a Bahá'í to be called into question. We are instructed by The Universal House of Justice to make the following reply.

...s article raises fundamental issues about the station of the Manifestations and Their authority, as well as about the nature of individual interpretation.

It is clear from a study of the Text that infallibility is an essential attribute of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

... the Most Great Infallibility is confined to the One Whose station is immeasurably exalted beyond ordinances or prohibitions and is sanctified from errors and omissions....

... Were He to pronounce right to be wrong or denial to be belief, He speaketh the truth as bidden by God. This is a station wherein sins or trespasses neither exist nor are mentioned.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 108, 109)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Some Answered Questions*, stresses the inseparability of "essential infallibility" from the Manifestation of God, and states:

... as the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infallibility, therefore whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality. They are not under the shadow of the former laws. Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever They perform is an upright action.

The following extract from a letter dated 11 January 1942 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer underlines the vital link between Revelation and the infallibility of the Manifestation:

Regarding your Bahá'í friend who does not fully understand the infallibility of the Manifestation of God: You should influence that person to study the matter more deeply, and to realize that the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh, or one of the others. If They are not infallible, then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress.

As to the infallibility of the content of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, ... cites issues concerning the chronology of philosophical figures mentioned in Mr. Cole's article in the *World Order* magazine in 1979, as a basis for questioning the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh.... appears to have misconstrued the tenor of Mr. Cole's article. Mr. Cole's article does not challenge the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh, on the contrary, he shows that Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, states in the Tablet of Wisdom that He is quoting the writings of past sages. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily His knowledge encompasseth the earth and the heavens.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 149)*

Mr. Cole confirms this statement by comparison of the texts concerned. There is nothing in the text of this Tablet to show conclusively whether, by quoting these passages, Bahá'u'lláh was intending to confirm their assertions, or whether He was merely referring to historical authorities that were accepted by the audience He was addressing. It must be borne in mind that accounts of past events as recorded by historians of the East do not always agree with the accounts set down by chroniclers in other parts of the world. Perhaps in the future studies will be undertaken to ascertain the facts scientifically, if this is at all possible.

In reference to His Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh provides the following assurance that when viewed from the perspective of the Manifestation, the divine purpose of the verses will become apparent and questions will be resolved:

The verses are sent down at one time in a form that is untroubled by the rules of grammarians, transcending what the minds of men have yet conceived; and at another time they are sent down in a

style that conformeth to the standards of men. Thy Lord, verily, is potent over whatsoever He willeth by virtue of His words "Be, and it is." Wert thou to view them with Mine eyes thou wouldst see that they are in conformity with the most consummate rules, and wouldst give thanks to the Lord, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved.

(Newly translated)

As to the question of individual interpretation, while individual interpretation is the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, the application of logical analysis has inherent limitations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated:

Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient.

*(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, p. 254)*

Understanding of the Writings requires belief in the Manifestation of God, for, as the Master states:

... the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.

*(Some Answered Questions, p. 300)*

Other important components in this process include an attitude of prayerful humility, acceptance of the statements of the Manifestation, confidence in the knowledge that understanding of their meaning will emerge with meditation, study of the texts and the passage of time, willingness to acknowledge that one's views may be erroneous, and, courage to follow in the direction defined by the authentic sacred texts.

The House of Justice urges your National Spiritual Assembly to use the guidance contained in this letter as a basis for guiding and educating the believer in question about some of the fundamental verities of Bahá'í belief as a means of assisting him to determine his relationship to the Faith....

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice for the implementation of this weighty responsibility.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

9 March 1987

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 8 February 1987 in which you inquire about the role of the individual in interpretation of the Writings: specifically whether given the existence of interpretations by the Master and the Guardian of passages from the Writings, there remains room for personal interpretations of these same texts. We are instructed to convey the following points in reply.

The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian are divinely guided statements of what the Word of God means and as such these interpretations are binding on the friends. However, the existence of authoritative interpretations in no way precludes the individual from engaging in his own study of the teachings and thereby arriving at his own interpretation or understanding. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh invites the believers to "immerse" themselves in the "ocean" of His "words," that they "may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths."

Far from knowledge being limited, Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Muslim tradition that "every knowledge hath seventy meanings," and asserts that the "meaning" of the Word of God "can never be exhausted." This potential richness of meaning is underlined by the provision whereby future Guardians, while not abrogating the "interpretations of former Guardians," may "elaborate and elucidate former interpretations," as set out in the extract from a letter dated 19 February 1947 which was written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer:

... regarding future Guardians: they cannot "abrogate" the interpretations of former Guardians, as this would imply not only lack of guidance but mistakes in making them; however they can elaborate and elucidate former interpretations, and can certainly abrogate some former ruling laid down as a temporary necessity by a former Guardian.

Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a more complete understanding of the Faith. Such views, however, lack authority. The believers are, therefore, free to accept or disregard them. Further, the manner in which an individual presents his interpretation is important. For example, he must at no time deny or

contend with the authoritative interpretation, but rather offer his idea as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that his views are merely his own.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



Department of the Secretariat

10 March 1987

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 27 January 1987 and has asked us to convey on its behalf the following in response to the points you have raised.

It is not advisable for Bahá'í institutions or individuals to initiate actions designed to prod government leaders to urge their government or the leaders of other governments to convene the world conference called for by Bahá'u'lláh and echoed in *The Promise of World Peace*. Two points should be borne in mind in this regard: (1) Because of the political gravity of the decisions implied by this call and the differing political attitudes which it evokes, such actions on the part of the Bahá'í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying, as does the Peace Statement, the need for a convocation of world leaders and initiating the political processes towards its realization. (2) In the writings of the Faith (e.g., the closing passages of *The Promised Day Is Come*), it is clear that the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any Bahá'í plan or action. This is not to say that Bahá'ís should be inert. Indeed, Bahá'ís may promote the concept of the Lesser Peace with all that it implies without engaging in the political processes which its realization will require.

The House of Justice feels that the task before the Bahá'ís is to prepare the ground for the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government. This requires a number of related activities which have been indicated in the goals of previous and present Plans of the community based on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan. The activities which will indirectly prepare the world to make the final stride include the following.

The establishment as rapidly as possible of firmly grounded, efficiently functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies in every part of the world, so that seekers everywhere will have a point of reference to which they can turn for guidance and for the Teachings of the Faith. This implies a vast increase in Bahá'í membership. Although the Canadian and many other Bahá'í Communities have achieved remarkable progress, much work is required to bring the Bahá'í institutions all over the world to the degree of maturation that is needed.

A second important activity is the deepening of the believers, of all ages, in their understanding of and obedience to the Teachings of the Faith. A third is the proclamation of the Faith to all strata of society, and in particular to those in authority and to leaders of thought so that those who hold the direction of peoples in their hands will learn accurately about the nature and tenets of the Faith and will grow to respect it and implement its principles. A fourth is the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship, so that an increasing number of believers will be able to analyze the problems of mankind in every field and to show how the Teachings solve them. A fifth is the development of relations between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations, both directly with the highest United Nations institutions and at a grass-roots level in areas of rural development, education, etc.

These different activities, which began a long time ago and are still going on, coupled with the presentation of *The Promise of World Peace* to the leaders of the world, will gradually bring about circumstances which will indicate the direction of subsequent actions. The House of Justice will advise the Bahá'í world when the time is ripe for such actions. The unpredictability of certain events in the world, which are likely to change the current course of certain processes, makes it impracticable for the House of Justice to respond with precision to some of your questions.

The House of Justice in its message to The Bahá'ís of the World dated 2 January 1986 referred to Shoghi Effendi's perception of a dialectic of victory and crisis in the organic life of the Cause. This indicates the instrumentality of the forces of opposition which will help to bring about, over a period of time, conditions necessary for the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies to act effectively as Local and National Houses of Justice.

The stages of the evolution of these institutions, which will synchronize with the establishment of the Lesser Peace, are indicated in the writings of the beloved Guardian, such as in the following extract:

Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power.

*(The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 6–7)*

Your specific question about whether or not Bahá'ís in North America “are permitted to run for election to school boards, town or municipal councils, hospital boards and for local enforcement officer positions” should be answered by the National Assemblies concerned.

The completion of the buildings on the Arc “which will synchronize with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions—the one outside and the other within the Bahá'í world” speaks, as you have rightly perceived, “to the readiness of the Bahá'í Administrative Order to manage the ever-growing and complex affairs of the Cause as well as an increased capacity to interface with the non-Bahá'í world and its institutions.”

Regarding the question in the final paragraph of your letter, the following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer.

Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of The Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Super State—your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in the “Unfoldment of World Civilization.”

The fact that the Bahá'í institutions will not be directly involved in the eventual convocation of world leaders and in effecting the political unity of nations does not mean that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

25 March 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In furtherance of the goal of the Six Year Plan to educate the friends throughout the world in the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Research Department has prepared a simple codification of the law. A copy of this codification is enclosed for you to share, as you judge appropriate, with the friends under your jurisdiction. It is based largely on a codification produced spontaneously by some friends in Austria and on another written under the auspices of the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

References throughout the document are to the sections of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh which has already been sent to you.

To help the friends increase their understanding of the significance of this Law of God, the Research Department was also requested by The Universal House of Justice to prepare a brief history of the development of the Institution which has been associated with the Law since the early years of its operation. This is also enclosed and is based on an article in Persian written by the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí Muḥammad Varqá, apart from the final section about Dr. Varqá himself, which has been added by the Research Department.

It is hoped that National Spiritual Assemblies will use this material as extensively as possible to educate the friends and deepen their understanding of this vital law of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**A Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

**March 1987**

**Prepared by the Research Department  
at the request of The Universal House of Justice**

**I. Preamble**

Ḥuqúqu'lláh (The Right of God) is a great law (7) and a sacred institution (72). Laid down in the Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas), it is one of the key instruments for constructing the foundation and supporting the structure of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. It has far-reaching ramifications that extend from promoting the welfare of the individual, to buttressing the authority and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. In providing a regular and systematic source of revenue for the Central Institution of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh has assured the means for the independence and decisive functioning of the World Center of His Faith.

By identifying this law as “The Right of God” Bahá'u'lláh has reemphasized the nature of the relationship between human beings and their Creator as a Covenant based on mutual assurances and obligations; and, by designating the Central Authority in the Cause, to which all must turn, as the recipient of this Right, He has created a direct and vital link between every individual believer and the Head of his Faith that is unique in the structure of His World Order. This law enables the friends to recognize the elevation of their economic activity to the level of divine acceptability, it is a means for the purification of their wealth and a magnet attracting divine blessings. The computation and the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, within the general guidelines set forth, are exclusively a matter of conscience between the individual and God (8, 104); demanding or soliciting the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is prohibited (8, 9, 38, 71, 96, 104), only appeals, reminders and exhortations of a general nature, under the auspices of the institutions of the Faith, are permissible (38, 70, 99, 104, 107). That the observance and enforcement of this law, so crucial to the material well-being of the emerging Bahá'í commonwealth, should thus have been left entirely to the faith and conscience of the individual, gives substance to and sheds light on what the beloved Master calls the spiritual solution to economic problems. Indeed, the implications of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for the realization of a number of the principles of the Faith, such as the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty, and a more equitable distribution of resources, will increasingly become manifest as the friends assume in ever greater measure the responsibility for observing it.

The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh are promulgated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are to be found in other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, in Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in letters from Shoghi Effendi and The Universal House of Justice, mostly in response to questions raised by the friends. All these major references have been compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice and separately published. A study of that compilation makes it clear that the application of the law has been progressive, and will continue to be so, as its ramifications and subsidiary rulings are elucidated.

The following is a preliminary attempt at codifying the information in the Writings on the subject of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. It should be emphasized, however, that the friends should not attempt to read into it an element of rigidity or total comprehensiveness. The questions put to Bahá'u'lláh, the Master and Shoghi Effendi were from friends residing in places and times with infinitely simpler economic systems and

relationships than those which obtain today. What can be learned from them are clear guiding principles whose application to changing and more complex conditions must be considered. The subject will undoubtedly occupy The Universal House of Justice in evolving legislation, as necessary, for a long time to come. As the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith unfolds before the eyes of an increasingly watchful humanity, the universal assumption of the obligation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh by the friends will be a clear sign of attaining to a new level of spiritual maturity by the community of the Greatest Name throughout the world.

## **II. A Bounty Granted by God**

God, while being wholly independent of all created things, has in His bounty given us this law (7, 10, 63), for the progress and promotion of the Cause depend on material means (1). Obedience to this law enables the believer to be firm and steadfast in the Covenant (63), provides a reward in every world of the worlds of God (7), and is a unique test of true faith (62).

The Ḥuqúqu'lláh is to be offered joyfully and without hesitation (2, 9, 32). When the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is offered in this spirit it will impart prosperity and protection to the friends, purify their worldly possessions (20, 31, 42, 46, 48, 100), and enable them and their offspring to benefit from the fruits of their endeavors (48).

## **III. Determining the Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

### **1. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh are:**

- The residence and its needful furnishings (11).
- The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce income for one's subsistence (12, 67, 68).

### **2. Payment falls due:**

- Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable as soon as a person's assessable possessions reach or exceed the value of 19 mithqáls of gold (18, 19, 30). [19 mithqáls equals approximately 2.2 troy ounces, or approximately 69.2 grams (87, 105, 110). At the present time—March 1987—this is equivalent to some US\$914.]
- The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the assessable property (10, 14).
- The payment is due on whole units of 19 mithqáls of gold (15).

### **3. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable on further units of 19 mithqáls of gold when subsequently acquired possessions, after the deduction of the annual expenses, raise the value of the assessable property sufficiently. Among the expenses to be deducted are:**

- The general expenses of living (65, 66, 69, 78).
  - Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions (103).
  - Sums which are paid to the State, such as taxes and duties (78).
4. When a person receives a gift or bequest it is to be added to his possessions and augments the total value in the same way as does an excess of annual income over expenditure (111).
  5. If a property increases in value, Ḥuqúqu'lláh is not payable on that increase until it is realized, e.g. on the sale of the property.
  6. If possessions decrease, such as through the expenses of a year exceeding the income received, Ḥuqúqu'lláh falls due again only after the loss has been made good and the total value of one's assessable possessions is augmented (15–19, 30, 65–68, 78, 108, 111).
  7. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (22).
  8. The payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is dependent on the person's financial ability to meet his obligations (24).
  9. On the death of a believer, the completion of his payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is accomplished in the following manner:
    - The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial (22).
    - Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (13).
  10. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh still due on the property should then be paid. In establishing the value of the property on which Ḥuqúq has not already been paid, the following are among the deductions to be made:
    - expenses of burial (22),
    - debts of the deceased (13),
    - loss of value of the assets when realized (103) and
    - expenses incurred in realizing the assets (103).
  11. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu'lláh:
    - It is left to the discretion of the individual believer to decide what is "needful" for himself and his family (104–6, 112).

- Although references are made to annual payments of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the time and method of payment are left to the discretion of the individual believer. There is, therefore, no obligation to liquidate one's assets in haste in order to fulfill one's current obligations to Ḥuqúqu'lláh (103).
- Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honor their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).
- The account of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be kept separate from other contributions, inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is subject to decision by the Central Authority in the Cause to which all must turn, whereas the purposes of the contributions to other Funds may be determined by the donors themselves.
- Payment of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh has priority over making contributions to other Funds of the Faith (78, 79, 97, 100), as well as over the cost of pilgrimage (31). It is, however, left to the discretion of the believer whether or not he treats his contributions to the Fund as an expense when arriving at the value of the annual accretion to his property for the purpose of calculating the Ḥuqúqu'lláh that he is due to pay (105).

#### **IV. Applicability of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh can be enforced only gradually because the time must be ripe if the desired results are to be attained (84–86). Thus hitherto the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has been applied only to the believers from Iran and other countries of the Middle East. The other believers have been encouraged to support their local and national funds in its place but, although the law is not yet binding on them, they are and have been free to offer the Ḥuqúqu'lláh if they wish to do so (82, 93, 102, 103, 109, 110).

#### **V. Payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

The Ḥuqúqu'lláh is normally paid to the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, his Deputies, or their appointed Representatives (35, 58). These persons issue receipts and forward the funds to the World Center (56).

#### **VI. Management of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

Decisions on the necessary ordinances concerning Ḥuqúqu'lláh (81, 100), as well as on its disposition, lie within the sole jurisdiction of the Central Authority in the Cause. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh can be employed for charitable purposes (62, 65, 75), or for other purposes useful to the Cause of God (77, 78).

### **The Development of the Institution for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh**

**March 1987**



Prepared by the Research Department  
at the request of The Universal House of Justice

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to this Law as ranking in importance immediately after the two great obligations of recognition of God and steadfastness in His Cause, and yet the introduction and implementation of this Law are characterized by kindness, forgiveness, tolerance and magnanimity. Although it deals with the material things of this world, it is placed among those spiritual obligations resting on the individual soul, such as prayer and fasting, the fulfillment of which is a direct responsibility of each believer towards God, not subject to the sanctions or impositions of His institutions in this world. It is, indeed, a clear expression of the priorities with which Bahá'u'lláh views the duties of mankind. First comes the spiritual, and then the material—however important in practice the latter may be.

After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas had been revealed in response to the pleas of the friends, Bahá'u'lláh withheld it from publication for some time and even then, when a number of devoted Bahá'ís, having learned of the law, endeavored to offer the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the payment was not accepted. The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh show His acute consciousness of the way in which material wealth has been permitted to degrade religion in the past, and He preferred the Faith to sacrifice all material benefits rather than to soil to the slightest degree its dignity and purity. Herein is a lesson for all Bahá'í institutions for all time.

However, as the beloved Guardian explained, funds are the life-blood of the Cause. God Himself, as Bahá'u'lláh stated, has made achievement dependent on material means. Therefore, as the awareness of the friends grew, He permitted the Ḥuqúqu'lláh to be accepted, provided the donor made the offering willingly with joy and awareness.

To receive the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh brought into being one of the great Institutions of the Faith, the Trusteeship of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

The first to be honored with appointment as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad from Manshád, Yazd, who eventually received from the Blessed Beauty the title of Amínu'l-Bayán (Trustee of the Bayán). Hájí Sháh Muḥammad had embraced the Faith in its early years and had the bounty of entering the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad. The fire of love kindled in his heart made him impatient to offer his services to the Threshold of his Beloved, and this undertaking he followed until the last moment of his life, surrendering all material belongings in the path of service. Encompassed by hardship, danger and lack of means, this trusted servant of Bahá'u'lláh, in journey after journey, would carry the friends' donations of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and their petitions to the Sacred Threshold and, in return, bring them news and Tablets from the Blessed Perfection.

One of the most sacred tasks entrusted to Amínu'l-Bayán was to go to Iran to receive the Remains of the Báb from their custodian, the devoted and valiant Hand of the Cause of God Jináb-i-Hájí Ákhúnd, and to transfer them through innumerable dangers to a safe hiding place in the Mosque of the Imámzádiḥ Zayd in Tehran, where they lay concealed until the time when, at the behest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they were transferred to the Holy Land to be laid in their permanent resting place on the slopes of Mount Carmel.

The attention of Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad was drawn to the rare qualities of nobility and detachment of one of the believers, Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan Ardakání, who was also from Yazd. The bond of fellowship between them became so strong that they became the closest of companions. Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad chose Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan to be his assistant and confidant in his services as the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. They were among the first group of pilgrims who, after encountering grave hardships and difficulties, were able to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. On their return to Iran they decided to make numerous journeys together, and on one of these journeys, in 1881, they were attacked and caught during a Kurdish revolt, and Jináb-i-Ḥájí Sháh Muḥammad was seriously wounded. Bahá'u'lláh instructed that, following the passing of Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad, the office of Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be conferred upon his loyal assistant and companion, Jináb-i-Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan, who was subsequently entitled Amín (the Trusted One) or Jináb-i-Ḥájí Amín.

Jináb-i-Ḥájí Amín was a shining star who served the Cause for forty-seven years with eagerness and zeal, showing magnanimity, courage and incredible steadfastness. During the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh he was imprisoned twice, by order of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh and his son, Kámrán Mírzá. In the course of his second imprisonment, in the prison of Qazvín, referred to as Sijn-i-Matín (the Mighty Prison) by Bahá'u'lláh in the opening verses of the Tablet of the World, he was together with the Hand of the Cause Ḥájí Ákhúnd. Here, Jináb-i-Amín suffered gravely, his legs in fetters and a chain around his neck. His jailers, in order to torment him, would add castor oil to his food. With manifest resignation and submission, he would neither complain nor refuse the food, eating as though nothing were amiss. He was a symbol of magnanimity and detachment. He had no worldly possessions, no home or shelter of his own. His habitation was in the hearts and souls of the Bahá'í friends who would receive and entertain him with warmth and love. Each one would impatiently await his arrival, to enjoy the sweet melody of his prayers and chanting of the Tablets, the glad-tidings and encouragement he would bring. Every day he would bid good-bye to one family to spend the night in another household, illumining another gathering with his presence. He was continually on the move, traveling to most Iranian cities and being the trusted adviser of many Bahá'í friends in their personal affairs.

Among the countless journeys that Ḥájí Amín made was one to Paris where he attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During his long life he witnessed the last eleven years of the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, the twenty-nine years of the Ministry of the Center of the Covenant, and seven years of the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. Towards the end of his life he became ill and frail and was confined to bed, living in the home of his friend and assistant, Ḥájí Ghulám Riḍá, who, at the express desire of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had been appointed his successor as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Upon his passing in 1928, Ḥájí Amín was named by the beloved Guardian a Hand of the Cause of God.

The third Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Jináb-i-Ghulám Riḍá, was entitled Amín-i-Amín (Trustee of the Trustee). This distinguished soul was born into the wealthy merchant class of Tehran and was brought up to enjoy the comfortable life associated with it. During his youth, the urge to discover spiritual realities led him to the study of comparative religion and, while engaged in his business, he ventured to search out and associate with followers and leaders of religion. Disappointed in what he found, he sought more

information about the Bahá'í Faith, which had been introduced to him by his secretary. This enquiry soon developed into a serious study of the sacred Tablets and Writings and his heart was illumined with the light of faith. After embracing the Cause, Jináb-i-Hájí Ghulám Riḍá engaged in Bahá'í activities and, at the age of 32, he gave up trade to devote himself fully and freely to the service of the Faith. He developed a special attachment to Jináb-i-Amín and became his constant assistant. In due course he received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá urging him to emulate Jináb-i-Amín and appointing him as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. While ever mindful of the responsibilities of his new position, he took the utmost care of Jináb-i-Amín for the remainder of his life.

Jináb-i-Ghulám Riḍá held the rank of Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for eleven years. His home became a center for the gatherings of the friends and for the administration of the affairs of the Faith. It was during his Trusteeship that initial steps were taken for the registration of Bahá'í properties and endowments in Iran, and he was assiduous in doing his utmost for their protection and preservation. In 1938 he fell ill and passed away.

The fourth Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, appointed to this position by the beloved Guardian, was Jináb-i-Valíyu'lláh Varqá, the third son of Varqá the martyr. He was born in Tabríz and, after the martyrdom of his father and brother, he was brought up from early childhood by his grandmother, a staunch, powerful and fanatical Muslim. She did her utmost, until his early youth, to sow the seeds of enmity to the Faith in his heart. When he was sixteen, his uncle, surnamed Akhu'sh-Shahíd (the Brother of the Martyr), managed to remove him from this agonizing atmosphere of prejudice and took him to his home in Míyándu'áb. There he introduced him to the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, opening a new world to Jináb-i-Varqá. So afire did he become with love for the Faith that, without any preparations, he decided to go on pilgrimage in the company of a close friend. However, his Local Spiritual Assembly did not approve of this, and guided him, instead, to go to Tehran to join his elder brother Jináb-i-'Azízu'lláh Varqá.

After his schooling in Tehran, Jináb-i-Varqá's longing to make his pilgrimage was fulfilled, and he then attended the American University in Beirut, deepening his knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings under the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his summer vacations. During this time he made a journey to Iran at the behest of the Master, and later accompanied Him on His historic journey to Europe and America, as an interpreter. Upon the completion of this journey, he returned to Iran and rendered invaluable services on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, in many Bahá'í administrative agencies, and ultimately on the National Spiritual Assembly. His loyal and dedicated service as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was to follow, occupying him for seventeen years, during which time the observance of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was spread throughout Iran, so that ever more of the friends fulfilled their obligations, offering large sums and many properties. In order to devote his full time to this sacred enterprise, Jináb-i-Varqá resigned from the work in which he was employed.

In 1951 Jináb-i-Valíyu'lláh Varqá was among the first contingent of eminent believers elevated by Shoghi Effendi to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God. This opened new opportunities for him to meet with the friends and cheer their hearts with news of the victories being achieved in the teaching work, especially

during the Ten Year Crusade, which opened at Ridván 1953. These memorable services culminated in the fulfillment of his long-cherished desire to visit the beloved Guardian.

On his return to Iran from pilgrimage, a previous ailment grew worse, and Jináb-i-Varqá was forced to go to Tübingen in Germany for hospital treatment and an operation. The treatment, alas, was unsuccessful, and in November 1955 his noble life drew to a close.

In the cable announcing the passing of Valíyu'lláh Varqá, Shoghi Effendi included the words: "His mantle as Trustee Ḥuqúq now falls on 'Alí Muḥammad, his son.... Newly appointed Trustee Ḥuqúq now elevated rank Hand Cause."

Just two years following the appointment of Jináb-i-'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá to this onerous task, he and his fellow Hands of the Cause of God were confronted with the heart-breaking and soul-stirring events associated with the passing of the beloved Guardian, and carried the entire Bahá'í world to the victorious conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade, bringing into being, at Ridván 1963, The Universal House of Justice.

The following twenty-three years have seen storms of tribulation and persecution afflicting the Bahá'í community in Iran, causing immense problems to be wrestled with in relation to the safeguarding and sale of properties donated for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh as well as a multitude of other historic tasks that have fallen to the lot of Jináb-i-Varqá in his capacity as a Hand of the Cause of God.

The successive teaching plans caused an outflow of pioneers from Iran to all corners of the world, requiring the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to appoint Deputies and Representatives in many countries beyond the borders of Iran until, at this time, the Institution is represented in every continent of the earth. Not only do the friends from Middle Eastern countries continue to obey the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in their adopted countries, but, increasingly, other friends have been moved to offer the Ḥuqúq.

A new stage, therefore, has now been opened in the development of this Institution, a stage that will for ever be associated with the opening of the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith and the emergence of the Bahá'í community from obscurity into the arena of world affairs.

## The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1987

To the Bahá'ís of the World

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 Counselors, 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 Center 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 worldwide attention increasingly being focused 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 defenseless 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 programs, 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 interreligious 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 enrollment 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 interassembly assistance projects, the reformation 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 Counselors, 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 Fulfillment, unsurpassed alike in the duration of its Author's ministry and the fecundity and splendor 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 Center 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## The Universal House of Justice

30 April 1987

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

This Riḍván, after decades of unabated effort involving prolonged, delicate negotiations, the Government of the State of Israel and the Bahá'í World Centre signed an international agreement whose implications—spiritual, historical, and practical—are inestimable for the rapidly evolving World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Approved by unanimous vote of the Cabinet of the National Unity Government, the Agreement states as reasons for the Government's concurrence in it the "friendly relations between the Bahá'í world community and the State of Israel" and the "desire of the Government of Israel to give effect to this relationship, and to its recognition of the special status of the Bahá'í World Centre." These friendly relations trace their foundation to the inspired initiatives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, particularly during the period following the Revolution of the Young Turks in 1908 when a general amnesty was effected for religious and political prisoners held under the old regime. The prestige acquired by the Faith through the dynamic force of the Master's unique spirit was demonstrated after His release from imprisonment in the actions He took to establish His residence in Haifa at the foot of Mount Carmel, to inter the sacred remains of the Báb in the mausoleum which had been erected by Him on the spot designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and to travel extensively in the West. Subsequent to these travels, it was more conspicuously illustrated through the excellent relations He forged with high and low alike, the social impact of His liberal ministrations to the needs of the people in the Holy Land, and the conferring of a knighthood upon Him by the British Crown.

This legacy of prestige was evident in the recognition accorded Shoghi Effendi as Head of the Faith by the authorities of the British Mandate. The extent of the Guardian's energetic exertions to achieve recognition of the independent status of the Faith, whose permanent spiritual and administrative centers are in the Holy Land, is beyond the scope of this letter and must, in due time, be afforded full treatment in the work of future historians. Let it suffice to reaffirm here that what he was able to accomplish during the years of the Mandate, in securing custody of Bahá'í properties and in obtaining official protection of the Holy Places, recognition of the Bahá'í marriage certificate and of Bahá'í Holy Days, and relief from certain taxes, combined to reflect a status for the Faith which was accepted by the new Government when the State of Israel was established in 1948. Writing on Shoghi Effendi's behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly on 30 May 1952, his secretary stated that "All the Bahá'í properties and imports are exempt from taxation and customs, and the status of the Faith as a religion, recognized." However, the letter pointed out that "At present, we are planning to clarify our legal position with the Government, and get it on a more concrete footing." It is precisely in fulfilling the need for such clarification and more concrete footing that the



instrument recently signed in Jerusalem represents a distinctive stage in the relations of the Bahá'í World Centre with the Government of this country.

In a ceremony at the Foreign Ministry on 22 April 1987, the second day of Ridván, the Agreement, comprising an exchange of letters, was signed by Mr. Shimon Peres, Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, on behalf of the Government of Israel, and Mr. Donald Barrett, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community, on behalf of the Bahá'í World Centre, in the presence of other high-ranking government officials and Mr. Ronald Bates, Deputy Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community. Among its contents are the following statements of recognition:

The Government of Israel recognizes the members of the Bahá'í Faith as a recognized religious community in Israel in accordance with Article 2 of the Palestine Order in Council, 1922–1947, and confirms that the Bahá'í World Centre is the world spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í world community and that The Universal House of Justice in Haifa is the Head of the Bahá'í Faith and its Supreme Institution in accordance with its Constitution.

The Government of Israel recognizes that the holiest places of the Bahá'í Faith, in accordance with the Bahá'í Sacred Scriptures, are located in Israel, and confirms that The Universal House of Justice is the Trustee of the Bahá'í International Community over the Holy Places of the Bahá'í Faith in Israel and over the Bahá'í endowments in Israel.

From such clearly stated recognition flow privileges and benefits befitting the spiritual and administrative center of a world Faith. These provisions of the Agreement are defined in terms that are renewable or renegotiable at certain intervals, lending a flexibility and extension to the Agreement that are among its salient features. The Agreement can thus be regarded as the culmination of a series of preliminary measures of official recognition variously granted by sundry governmental authorities over a span of decades, now confirmed, amplified, extended, and defined in an instrument which places the operation of the Bahá'í World Centre on a solid basis in its relations with the Government of Israel and in its other external relations. It thus launches a new phase in the development of the administration of the Faith at its World Center.

Of unusual importance—and fraught with implications for the future dealings of the Bahá'í community everywhere as the Faith passes through the stages of its evolution until its stature is fully acclaimed by the nations—is the nature of the final negotiations, which engaged our representatives in extensive consultations with highly placed officials, and from which emerged the procedure for sealing the Agreement. For it is a singular fact that the representative of a sovereign government, in the person of its Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, and the representative of what was justifiably acknowledged as the “world center of a recognized international non-governmental organization” sat down together to sign an “International Agreement,” the first such occurrence in the history of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

That this should have taken place in the Holy Land, to which only some 120 years ago the Founder of that Cause was banished as a prisoner, evokes in us feelings of wonderment and astonished joy. That the

Government which was party to so unprecedented an act happens to be that of a people who have only recently returned, after many centuries of exile, to their homeland bespeaks a token of divine favor of incalculable spiritual and historical importance for the Jewish people.

Dear Friends, the Status Agreement now achieved makes an indelible mark on the Formative Age of our Faith, assuming a special place among the swiftly accumulating evidences of the divine confirmations which have thus far distinguished the opening period of the fourth epoch of that Age. These accompanying signs of God's abounding grace clearly include:

- The Conference of Continental Counselors at the World Center at the close of which on 2 January 1986 was announced the opening of the fourth epoch.
- The establishment in Jerusalem of an Office of Representation for the Bahá'í International Community to facilitate the relations of the World Center with the Government of Israel.
- The successful conclusion of the Seven Year Plan, unforgettable for the stature the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh attained betokening its emergence from obscurity—an emergence resulting largely from the indescribable sacrifices of the beloved friends in Iran.
- The completion of the distribution of *The Promise of World Peace* to heads of state and the outstanding events associated with the promulgation of its contents.
- The launching of the Six Year Plan which incorporated the feature of planning involving the consultation of Continental Counselors with National Spiritual Assemblies, and to a large extent, consultation at the grass roots of the national Bahá'í communities, leading to the choice of goals for their countries by these National Spiritual Assemblies.
- The first visit of a head of government to the World Center to consult with The Universal House of Justice on issues raised in its Peace Statement.
- The participation of Bahá'í publishers in an International Book Fair in the capital of the People's Republic of China.
- The dedication of the Mother Temple of the Indian sub-continent, an event which opened new opportunities for the Faith to be proclaimed in the Soviet Union, Eastern bloc countries, and China, and which has induced the visits of high-ranking officials from these and other countries to the Temple.
- The establishment in Liberia of the first Bahá'í radio station on the continent of Africa.
- The adoption of the design created by Mr. Ḥusayn Amánat for the complex of edifices remaining to be constructed on the Arc on Mount Carmel.

One practical and spiritually confirming effect of the signing of the Status Agreement is that it brings us within reach of the realization of the beloved Guardian's vision for the Arc on God's Holy Mountain. For with the Agreement in hand formidable obstacles to the execution of the Arc Project have been removed. The conjunction of the completion of the architect's design and the favorable action of the Government thus signals the ripeness of the time to pursue the obligation acutely felt by the entire Bahá'í world to bring to fruition, as soon as possible, the work begun by Shoghi Effendi in the erection of the Archives Building and carried forward in the completion four years ago of the Seat of The Universal House of Justice. The plans to be made and the material requirements for so extraordinary an undertaking will, of course, be communicated to the friends in due course. In the meantime, we are happy to announce that the architect of the Indian Temple, Mr. Fariborz Sahba has been assigned the task of designing the Terraces to be situated below and above the Shrine of the Báb; he has also been appointed Project Manager to execute the design already adopted for the three remaining buildings on the Arc.

We rejoice to know that the entire company of Bahá'u'lláh's loved ones joins us in prayers of thanksgiving for the manifold blessings He is showering in such profusion on the humble efforts being made in His glorious Name.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

15 June 1987

[To two individuals]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 11 April 1987, signed by yourselves, ... , and ... , has been received by The Universal House of Justice, and we have been instructed to convey the following response to you.

The House of Justice is deeply concerned at the plight of so many of the indigenous and aboriginal peoples in various parts of the world who have been denied their rights as a consequence of actions by oppressive majorities. Such inequities and injustices are to be found in many countries. The purpose of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh is to lift the yoke of oppression from His loved ones, to liberate all the people of the world, and to provide the means for their abiding happiness.

The Bahá'í approach to resolution of the manifold problems affecting human society rests upon the assertion by Bahá'u'lláh that these ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease, which the Divine Physician has diagnosed to be disunity. Bahá'u'lláh has made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the health and harmony of the whole of mankind is its unification. He says, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203). By contrast, the approach of most people is the exact opposite: their concentration is on attempts to remedy the multitude of ills besetting mankind, with the expectation that the resolution of these problems will lead ultimately to unity.

This unity can only be achieved through the spreading of the Faith and the building up of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh states in *Gleanings*, Section 120:

That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error.

As Shoghi Effendi states in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 34:

What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, 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....

Such an effort is frequently misunderstood by others who feel that the Bahá'ís are not concentrating on solving the immediate and pressing problems. This concern was addressed by the House of Justice in a letter written on 19 November 1974 to a National Spiritual Assembly:

... Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the "real problems" of their fellow-men. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only "real" good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellow-men, uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as that Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

It is contrary to Bahá'í principles for a believer to resort to partisan political action in asserting his rights or in seeking to obtain justice. It would be quite wrong for a Bahá'í to take up arms for a cause he or she believes to be just; such an action would be a direct contradiction of the aims of the Faith and of its laws. Believers are enjoined to deepen themselves more fully in the principles of world order expounded by Shoghi Effendi in his writings, so that they will gradually come to understand the underlying cause of the oppression of minorities, as well as the spiritual forces released by Bahá'u'lláh and animating the work of the Bahá'í community in laboriously erecting and perfecting the administrative institutions which are the means by which justice is being established in the world.

Bahá'ís are free to work within the existing political and legal system. There is no objection to any Bahá'í's making a legal claim to property or rights through the courts or administrative agencies to which he has access.

With the emergence of the Faith from obscurity, there are increasing opportunities to bring Bahá'í principles to the attention of governments and to offer advice in the promotion of human rights. It is essential that such endeavors be carried out under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly. The believers are free to make suggestions to their National Assemblies or to recommend a course of action, but they must trust in the wisdom of their National Spiritual Assemblies to decide whether or not such action is appropriate.

The House of Justice hopes the above makes clear the Bahá'í position on the important issue raised in your letter. We are asked to assure you that prayers will be offered at the Sacred Threshold for all those concerned with this distressing problem.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

19 June 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 10 June 1987 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

The House of Justice was very pleased to know how fruitful you have found the consultation at your recent National Conventions to have been.

The Convention is, of course, free to decide that every suggestion made by a delegate be recorded and conveyed to the National Spiritual Assembly. Beyond this, the National Assembly members who are present are always free to note down for their own interest and further discussion any points that are made. It is by no means necessary to have a formal consultation and vote on every recommendation. It is important to remember, however, that the National Convention is not a conference, it is a consultative institution of the Faith; therefore, consultation and formal voting on recommendations should not be ruled out altogether. There may, for example, be disagreement among the delegates on certain proposals put forward, and it would be fruitful for the matter to be discussed and voted upon so that the National Spiritual Assembly will know the recommendation of the Convention as a whole on those issues.

Detailed aspects of Convention procedure which are not defined in the National Bahá'í Constitution, being secondary in nature, are within the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly to decide. The House of Justice feels that it is generally advisable not to be rigid and to leave it to the discretion of the Convention officers, or the Convention itself, to decide which recommendations need to be discussed and voted upon and which may be recorded without more ado. A distinction should be made in the record between recommendations of the entire Convention and those which are merely the proposals of individual delegates.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

21 June 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Finland

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

... The outstanding success of the peace conference in Finlandia Hall which your community sponsored last autumn remains one of the highlights among the various Bahá'í peace events held throughout the world since the issuance of *The Promise of World Peace*. The House of Justice is happy to know of your continuing effort to keep the subject of world peace before the Finnish people; however, it advises you to be careful in choosing what such follow-up efforts should be and offers the following comments on your specific question about promoting the idea of a world conference of government leaders.

It is not advisable for Bahá'í institutions or individuals to initiate actions designed to prod government leaders to urge their governments or the leaders of other governments to convene the world conference called for by Bahá'u'lláh and echoed in *The Promise of World Peace*. Two points should be borne in mind in this regard: (1) Because of the political gravity of the decisions implied by this call and the differing political attitudes which it evokes, such actions on the part of the Bahá'í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying, as does the Peace Statement, the need for a convocation of world leaders and initiating the political processes towards its realization. (2) In the writings of the Faith (e.g., the closing passages of *The Promised Day Is Come*), it is clear that the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or action.

The following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer:

Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of The Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Super State—your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in the “Unfoldment of World Civilization.”



It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. The fact that Bahá'í institutions will not be directly involved in the eventual convocation of the world leaders and in effecting the political unity of nations does not mean that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of humanity. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, by living the Teachings, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the foundation for world peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal. The Bahá'ís should do whatever they can within the context of their Bahá'í teaching and consolidation plans and also through their professional and other regular activities to promulgate universal peace.

It is a source of great satisfaction to the House of Justice to see with what intensity the peace initiative of the Bahá'í community is being pursued by the friends, who must now accelerate their activities at the grassroots level. The grassroots effort of the Bahá'ís should prepare the ground for the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government. This it can do by concentrating on wide and continual dissemination of the Peace Statement whose contents should be known by the generality of humanity, on engaging people from all walks of life in discussions on peace, and on instilling and encouraging a sense of personal commitment to the prerequisites of peace. In a word, what is needed now is a worldwide consciousness of not only the requirements but also the possibility and inevitability of peace. Therefore, our immediate and inescapable task as Bahá'ís is to imbue the populations with such hope.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

28 June 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 25 May 1987 concerning Mr... has been received by The Universal House of Justice, which has directed us to reply as follows.

In considering the status of believers such as Mr... , it is necessary to review the requirements for membership in the Bahá'í community. The basic considerations are set out by the Guardian in his statement:

... I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world—these I conceive to be the fundamental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision....

(*Bahá'í Administration*, p. 90, October 24, 1925)

This specification was restated by The Universal House of Justice in addressing the issue of acceptance of new believers, when it wrote:

Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

(From a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 13 July 1964)

It follows that individuals who do not satisfy these requirements cannot be regarded as members of the Bahá'í community, irrespective of whatever statements they might make concerning the nature of their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Such a situation arises, in some instances, when a person claims to accept the station of Bahá'u'lláh but does not accept the authority of the Administrative Institutions. The Guardian clarified this matter in a letter written on his behalf, stating:

... To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept the teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. To be a Bahá'í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause....

(Letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, 30 May 1930)

If you feel that Mr.... does not accept "the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh" as explained above, despite the statements he might make asserting his acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith, you should remove his name from the list of members and regard him as being a non-Bahá'í.

If you feel that the continued association of the Bahá'ís with Mr.... is potentially damaging to their belief or is detrimental to the unity of the community, you could well consider advising the believers to avoid association with him.

The House of Justice advises you to deal with this matter in a straightforward way, avoiding any actions which might serve to increase Mr....'s sense of his own importance or which might needlessly antagonize him and hence provoke him into active opposition of the Institutions.

The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance in resolving this matter.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

15 July 1987

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has studied carefully the information conveyed in your minutes about the functioning of your Executive Committee. It has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

It is entirely appropriate for your Assembly to appoint an Executive Committee and to authorize it to take action between National Spiritual Assembly meetings. While a committee of this type can be of considerable value to your Assembly, great care and close monitoring is required to guard against its becoming a source of difficulties which could ultimately weaken the authority of the Assembly.

Such a committee may be authorized to handle emergency matters which legitimately cannot await consultation by the full membership of the National Assembly, or matters which are of a routine nature and which can be dealt with through straightforward application of existing policy. Care is needed to ensure that the Executive Committee does not stray inadvertently beyond these bounds, and the functioning of the Committee should be a matter of careful review by the Assembly periodically.

The National Assembly has the responsibility to select the Assembly members who are to comprise the Committee. Valid meetings of the Executive Committee can take place only when all of its appointed members are duly notified. All members of the Assembly who have taken no part in the Executive Committee meeting should be informed of the decisions and actions taken, as soon after the meeting as practicable. This will afford them the opportunity to express the view as to whether the matter considered by the Committee should properly await a full meeting of the National Assembly. There may, of course, be instances when the urgency of a matter is such that a Committee decision has to be implemented before the other Assembly members can be informed; such instances are likely to be rare, and the Committee should be prepared to explain to the next meeting of the Assembly why it felt it necessary to proceed with such speed.

Furthermore, the matters considered by the Executive Committee should be placed on the agenda for the next full meeting of the National Assembly for ratification or otherwise. The House of Justice does not feel that it is sufficient to regard Executive Committee minutes as being "approved in principle" in the course of

subsequent National Assembly consultation, nor does it feel that it is correct to delay submission of a full report of Executive Committee decisions to other than the next Assembly meeting.

As stated above, the House of Justice recognizes the value of your having an Executive Committee to avoid taking up the limited Assembly consultation time with routine matters, and to provide a mechanism by which urgent matters can be dealt with. However, it cautions you to be aware that there are dangers that such a committee could create a caucus within the Assembly membership which comes to the meetings with matters already discussed and minds made up. The Assembly must be vigilant to ensure that such an unfortunate condition does not occur, and that the Executive Committee does not unintentionally take over and handle the work of the National Assembly itself. Limits on the functioning of the Committee should be set and observed, and the definition of what constitutes an urgent matter constantly monitored.

With the progressive development of efficient means of communication, it should be possible to involve a greater number of the Assembly members, if not all, in consultation on emergency issues without the necessity for all members to be physically present in the same location. While such facilities may not exist at the present time in . . . , their future development will doubtless remove some of the difficulties associated with decisions being made on urgent matters by a committee rather than by the full Assembly.

The House of Justice commends to your careful attention the points made in this letter, and assures you of its prayers for the confirmation of your devoted efforts to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in ....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

20 August 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 22 July 1987 has been received by The Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows.

The provisions set out in the letter of 17 July 1978 written to your National Spiritual Assembly on behalf of the House of Justice remain applicable, including the principle that it is improper for Bahá'ís to solicit funds from non-Bahá'ís in the name of the Faith for any purpose.

The following passage from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh: "It would be impossible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of the one true God, the riches which men possess" clearly indicates what the attitude of the Bahá'ís should be.

There is, however, a wide range of fund-raising activities in which Bahá'ís may engage. For example, Bahá'í institutions are free to approach governments or institutions which hold themselves out as wishing to fund charitable activities, to apply for grants to assist in specific humanitarian projects. A Bahá'í school which has both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í pupils is free to raise funds for its own development by such activities as concerts, etc., or by appeals to parents; in this instance, a humanitarian institution is clearly identified, and the funds are being collected in its name rather than in the name of the Faith. Another example is that of a Bahá'í who wishes to sell an item he owns to the general public for a fair market price; he is free to use the proceeds for any purpose he wishes, including contributing them all, or in part, to the Bahá'í Fund, provided he does not represent to the public that the sale is being conducted for the benefit of the Faith.

There would be no objection to the Bahá'í community's joining with others to give a concert or undertake some other similar activity to raise funds for a deserving charity. Such activities or even the making of donations to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sincere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fund-raising, a Bahá'í community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its Institutions.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



31 August 1987

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

Beloved Friends,

Nigh on one hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh walked on God's Holy Mountain and revealed the Tablet of Carmel, the Charter of the World Center of His Faith, calling into being the metropolis of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Through decades of oppression and expansion, persecution and emancipation, His followers have successfully labored to carry His message to the remotest regions of the earth, to erect the structure of His Administrative Order, and to proclaim to mankind the divinely prescribed cure for all its ills. In the past eight years the agonies suffered by His lovers in Iran have awakened the interest of a slumbering world and have brought His Faith to the center of human attention.

On this same Mount Carmel 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with infinite pains, raised the Mausoleum of the Báb on the spot chosen by His Father, and laid to rest within its heart the sacred remains of the Prophet Herald of the Faith, establishing a Spiritual Center of immeasurable significance. In accordance with the same divine command, Shoghi Effendi embellished the Shrine with an exquisite shell and then, under its protecting wing, began the construction of the Administrative Center of the Faith, to comprise five buildings in a harmonious style of architecture, standing on a far-flung Arc centering on the Monuments of the Greatest Holy Leaf, her Mother and Brother. The first of these five buildings, the International Archives, was completed in the beloved Guardian's lifetime. The second, the Seat of The Universal House of Justice, now stands at the apex of the Arc. Plans for the remaining three were prepared in fulfillment of a goal of the Seven Year Plan, and are now being detailed.

As indicated in our letter of 30 April 1987, the way is now open for the Bahá'í world to erect the remaining buildings of its Administrative Center, and we must without delay stride forward resolutely on this path.

Five closely related projects demand our attention: the erection of the three remaining buildings on the Arc and, added now to these, the construction of the terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the extension of the International Archives Building. A brief description of each of these will convey an impression of their significance for the Faith.

**The Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb.** In His plans for the development of Mount Carmel, 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisaged nineteen monumental terraces from the foot of the mountain to its crest, nine leading to the terrace on which the Shrine of the Báb itself stands, and nine above it. These plans were often referred to by Shoghi Effendi, and he completed in preliminary form the nine terraces constituting the approach to the Shrine from the central avenue of the former German Templar Colony.



**The International Teaching Centre** will be the seat of that institution which is specifically invested with the twin functions of the protection and propagation of the Cause of God. The institution itself, referred to by the beloved Guardian in his writings, was established in June 1973, bringing to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land and providing for the extension into the future of functions with which that body had been endowed.

**The Center for the Study of the Texts.** This building will be the seat of an institution of Bahá'í scholars, the efflorescence of the present Research Department of the World Center, which will assist The Universal House of Justice in consulting the Sacred Writings, and will prepare translations of and commentaries on the authoritative texts of the Faith.

**The International Archives Building.** We have decided to construct, westwards, an extension to the basement of the present Archives Building to provide accommodation for the central office of the ever-growing Archives at the World Center. This institution is charged with responsibility for the preservation of the Sacred Texts and Relics and the historic documents of the Cause of God.

**The International Bahá'í Library.** This Library is the central depository of all literature published on the Faith, and is an essential source of information for the institutions of the World Center on all subjects relating to the Cause of God and the conditions of mankind. In future decades its functions must grow, it will serve as an active center for knowledge in all fields, and it will become the kernel of great institutions of scientific investigation and discovery.

It is impossible at this stage to give an accurate estimate of the cost of these projects. All that we can now say is that in the immediate future two objectives have to be met: to accumulate rapidly a reserve of fifty million dollars on which plans for the construction can realistically begin to be implemented, and to provide an income of between twenty and twenty-five million dollars for the Bahá'í International Fund for each of the next ten years. As the work proceeds, contracts are signed and costs can be accurately determined, further information will be announced.

The great work of constructing the terraces, landscaping their surroundings, and erecting the remaining buildings of the Arc will bring into being a vastly augmented World Center structure which will be capable of meeting the challenges of coming centuries and of the tremendous growth of the Bahá'í community which the beloved Guardian has told us to expect. Already we see the effect of the spiritual energies which the completion of the Seat of The Universal House of Justice has released, and the new impulse this has given to the advancement of the Faith. Who can gauge what transformations will be effected as a result of the completion of each successive stage of this great enterprise? The Faith advances, not at a uniform rate of growth, but in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and victory. In a passage written on 18 July 1953, in the early months of the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi, referring to the vital need to ensure through the teaching work a "steady flow" of "fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts," stated that this flow would "presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world." This day the Bahá'í world has already seen in Africa, the Pacific, in Asia and in Latin America,

and this process of entry by troops must, in the present plan, be augmented and spread to other countries for, as the Guardian stated in this same letter, it “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.” This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour whose coming it is our task to hasten.

At this climacteric of human history, we are called upon to rise up in sacrificial endeavor, our eyes on the awe-inspiring responsibilities which such developments will place upon Bahá’í institutions and individual believers in every land, and our hearts filled with unshakeable confidence in the guiding Hand of the Founder of our Faith. That our Beloved Lord will arouse His followers in every land to a mighty united effort is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

22 October 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WE CONVEY WITH PROFOUND SADNESS NEWS OF THE ARREST IN TEHRAN ON 20 OCTOBER OF SIX BAHÁ'ÍS. OUR DISTRESS IS DEEPENED BY FACT THAT TWO OF THESE, MR. JAMÁLU'D-DIN KHÁNJÁNÍ AND MR. ḤASAN MAḤBÚBÍ, WERE MEMBERS OF THE FORMER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY, AND THAT THE ARRESTS OF SUCH PERSONS HAVE COME SO SOON AFTER THE EXECUTION ON 28 SEPTEMBER OF TWO OTHER FORMER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS.

THE OTHER FOUR INCLUDED IN THE ARRESTS ARE MR. CHANGÍZ FANÁ'ÍYÁN, MR. SUHRÁB ḤÁJÍYÁN, MR. BAHMAN SAMANDARÍ AND HIS WIFE, MRS. RUZÍTÁ SAMANDARÍ. ALL SIX WERE TOGETHER IN A PRIVATE HOME WHEN THEY WERE ARRESTED AND TAKEN TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION....

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Department of the Secretariat

14 December 1987

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

At the conference of representatives for external affairs held in Langenhain last month, a question was raised about Bahá'í relations towards governments and the principle of noninvolvement in politics. The representative of The Universal House of Justice referred to a letter dealing with this question which was sent to an individual at the direction of the House of Justice. We have now been requested to send to each of you for your information a copy of that letter dated 23 June 1987. It is enclosed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

23 June 1987

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 13 December 1986 inquiring about permissible activities of the Bahá'ís in relation to governments, but due to the pressure of many priorities at the World Center a reply to it regrettably has been delayed. We have been asked to convey the following.

Your letter touches upon a subject which, as time passes, will increasingly engage the attention of the House of Justice in accordance with its responsibilities as explicitly assigned in the Holy Texts. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh states:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 93)*

Elsewhere He states:

It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 89)*

And yet again He asserts:

All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

*(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 27)*

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said in a talk:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

*(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 1982 ed., p. 455)*

As can be seen from the current situation in the world and the current state in the development of the Bahá'í community, statements such as these indicate a future stage in the functioning of the House of Justice and of the operation of our world community; but in the meantime, the House of Justice will determine, as particular circumstances warrant, how the Bahá'ís and their national and local institutions will relate to their respective governments.

The general policy already enunciated by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 63–67, should be scrupulously upheld by the friends. However, as the Faith emerges from obscurity, the application of certain aspects of this policy will require the clarification of the House of Justice. With the passage of time, practices in the political realm will definitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Bahá'í writings. As a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of noninvolvement in politics will also undergo a change; but as Shoghi Effendi has written, this instruction, “at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West.”

In view of the necessity of the Bahá'í community to relate to governments, whether for reasons of defending its persecuted members or of responding to opportunities to be of service, a correct understanding of what is legitimate Bahá'í action in the face of the policy of noninterference with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Bahá'í community into certain

relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá'í community must increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient.

The support of passage of the Genocide Convention in the United States Senate, referred to in your letter, is a case in point. The particular circumstances which influenced the National Spiritual Assembly's involvement in the matter were delicate and compelling. There may be other situations in which significant questions being considered by a government are so intimately related to fundamental principles of our Faith, and the conditions are such, that the maintenance of strict neutrality on the part of the Bahá'í community to an individual believer would not be in the best interests of either the Faith or society. Awareness of this probability should, however, not cause the friends to go at a tangent and take such sensitive matters into their own hands. In any such situation the National Spiritual Assembly must weigh carefully the consequences, pro and con, of any contemplated action and carry out its decision, preferably with the foreknowledge and consent of the House of Justice. The friends must learn to appreciate this new situation, to acquiesce in the prerogative of their elected institutions to decide on questions involving or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in the incontrovertible promise of Bahá'u'lláh to protect His community.

Considering the unusual challenges facing National Spiritual Assemblies, particularly resulting from the persecutions in Iran and the issuance of the Peace Statement, The Universal House of Justice will surely continue to guide these institutions to relate to their governments in ways which will preserve the essentials of the policy of noninvolvement in politics.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

14 January 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Mariana Islands

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 25 November 1987 to the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community concerning the issues of "indigenous rights" and "self-determination" was passed to The Universal House of Justice, which has instructed us to convey the following reply.

With the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and the emphasis that His Revelation gives to the oneness of mankind, it is inevitable that peoples in all parts of the world who once seemed dormant or who have suffered discrimination would rise to assert their place in society. As with so many fundamental social issues, those concerning "indigenous rights" and "self-determination" find, for Bahá'ís, their proper expression and resolution within the context of the principle of the oneness of mankind. However, as is often the case, such issues are expressed in political forms which are unacceptable to Bahá'ís, who conscientiously avoid partisanship, subversion, and the corrupt attitudes and involvements associated with politics. At the same time, it is recognized that important issues of society fall within the province of government and perforce engage political processes currently in practice. Increasingly, as the Faith emerges from obscurity the Bahá'í community will find itself compelled to assist in finding solutions to the social problems afflicting humanity; it will have to be wise in its actions to avoid the pitfalls of politics.

Generally, the wisest course for the Bahá'í community in controversial situations is to remain uninvolved; however, at times when primary Bahá'í principles are at the heart of an issue, the decision of the National Assembly concerned should not necessarily be to observe silence but, rather, to take action which rises above the partisan political manifestations of the controversy. The Assembly may, for instance, present its own statement to the authorities, setting forth its views on essential issues on the basis of principle, letting the circumstances determine how the principle is best to be applied. If you feel that such action would be appropriate in the situation you face with respect to the issues raised in your letter, you may wish to draft such a statement, but before releasing it, kindly check with the World Center.

Concerning indigenous rights, it stands to reason that indigenous people are entitled to all the human rights accorded other peoples. For example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should be eliminated. At the same time, it would be unseemly for the demands for their rights to make, on the basis of their indigenesness, a special claim to exclusive rights and privileges which exceed the necessity to redress injustices. The Bahá'í attitude on such questions should be guided by Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." Thus it should be borne in mind that while upholding

indigenous rights may well deserve the support of the Bahá'ís, often the viewpoints of those claiming such rights are so circumscribed and narrow that Bahá'ís find it difficult to wholeheartedly subscribe to them.

The United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community will send you the statements requested in your letter.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat



4 February 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We feel that the period of the Fast from 2 March to 21 March is an appropriate time for The Bahá'ís of the World to offer special prayers on behalf of the Bahá'ís of Iran. Not only has the heroic perseverance of those tried and persecuted friends in the Cradle of the Faith attracted great admiration from Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, but also their courage and steadfastness have inspired other Bahá'í communities to increase their services to the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "Thou hast endowed every hour of these days with a special virtue, inscrutable to all except Thee, Whose knowledge embraceth all created things." Your daily prayers on behalf of the dear friends in Iran will have great significance during the Fast. We will beseech Bahá'u'lláh to answer the prayers of His beloved followers from all over the world that the present suffering of the Iranian Bahá'ís will be alleviated.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: 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 favorably conjoined developments is the emergence of a new paradigm of opportunity for further growth and consolidation of our worldwide 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 program 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 nongovernmental 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 Ḥuqúqu'lláh must be cultivated; the pioneers and traveling 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 revolves 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 vigor.

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, illuminated by a constant endeavor 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 splendor 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

31 May 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have been informed of a paper presented at a recent New Zealand Bahá'í Studies conference, which raises the possibility that the ineligibility of women for membership on The Universal House of Justice may be a temporary provision subject to change through a process of progressive unfoldment of the divine purpose. We present the following points as a means of increasing the friends' understanding of this established provision of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh that membership of The Universal House of Justice is confined to men.

The system of Bahá'í Administration is "indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith" as set forth in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A unique feature of this system is the appointment of authorized interpreters, in the persons of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, to provide authoritative statements on the intent of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Writing in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," Shoghi Effendi stated that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian "share ... the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá'í teachings." In relation to his own function as interpreter, he further stated that "the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá." The significance of this important provision is that the religion of God is safeguarded and protected against schism and its essential unity is preserved.

The function of the divinely appointed interpreters is evident in the progressive disclosure and clarification of the details of the Bahá'í teachings concerning the membership of The Universal House of Justice. Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings ordained both The Universal House of Justice and Local Houses of Justice. However, in many of His laws He refers simply to "the House of Justice" and its members as "Men of Justice," leaving open for later clarification to which level or levels of the whole institution each law would apply. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the unerring Interpreter of His Word, not only provided for the establishment of National Spiritual Assemblies, to be designated at some future time as Secondary Houses of Justice, but He also outlined the means by which The Universal House of Justice was to be elected. In His Will and Testament the Master wrote:

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers.... By this House is meant The Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one....

And in one of His Tablets He had already written:

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

In the following passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to membership of the "House of Justice" being restricted to men, without a specific designation of the level or levels of the institution to which this provision applied:

The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

*(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 80)*

Later the Master clarified that it was only The Universal House of Justice whose membership was confined to men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are the equals of men in all rights save only that of membership on The Universal House of Justice, for as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men. However, in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights with men.

*(from a newly translated Tablet)*

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, provided the following authoritative elaboration of this theme:

As regards your question concerning the membership of The Universal House of Justice: there is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local as well as the National Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected....

*(28 July 1936)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, it should also be noted, had, as attested by the above-cited extracts from His Tablets, affirmed that the ineligibility of women for election to The Universal House of Justice had been set out "in the text of the Book" and "in the explicit text of the Law of God." In other words, this provision was established by none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Further, in response to a number of questions about eligibility for membership and procedures for election of The Universal House of Justice, the Guardian's secretary writing on his behalf distinguished between

those questions which could be answered by reference to the “explicitly revealed” Text and those which could not. Membership of The Universal House of Justice fits into the former category. The letter stated:

The membership of The Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Fixing the number of the members, the procedures for election and the term of membership will be known later, as these are not explicitly revealed in the Holy Text.

(27 May 1940)

Hence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian progressively have revealed, in accordance with divine inspiration, the meaning and implications of Bahá’u’lláh’s seminal teachings. Their interpretations are fundamental statements of truth which cannot be varied through legislation by The Universal House of Justice.

The progressive clarification of the details of the laws concerning membership of the Houses of Justice has been accompanied by a gradual implementation of their provisions. For example, based on the Texts available to the believers at the time, membership of Local Houses of Justice was initially confined to men. When the Master began to elaborate on the differences between the levels of this Institution He clarified that the exclusion of women applied only to The Universal House of Justice. Thereafter, women became eligible for service as members of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. Women in the West, who already enjoyed the benefits of education and opportunities for social involvement, participated in this form of service much sooner than, for instance, their Bahá’í sisters in Iran, who were accorded this right only in 1954, “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.” It is important to note that the timing of the introduction of the provisions called for by the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian in relation to the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, rather than constituting a response to some external condition or pressure, was dictated by the principle of progressive implementation of the laws, as enjoined by Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Concerning the implementation of the laws, Bahá’u’lláh wrote in one of His Tablets:

Indeed the laws of God are like unto the ocean and the children of men as fish, did they but know it. However, in observing them one must exercise tact and wisdom.... One must guide mankind to the ocean of true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance.

As mentioned earlier, the law regarding the membership of The Universal House of Justice is embedded in the Text and has been merely restated by the divinely appointed interpreters. It is therefore neither amenable to change nor subject to speculation about some possible future condition.

With regard to the status of women, the important point for Bahá’ís to remember is that in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá’í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of The Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women. It must also be borne in mind that women are not excluded from any other international institution of the Faith. They are found among the ranks of the Hands of the Cause. They serve as members of the International Teaching Centre and as Continental Counselors. And, there is nothing in

the Text to preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal.

Though at the present time it may be difficult for the believers to appreciate the reason for the circumscription of membership on The Universal House of Justice to men, we call upon the friends to remain assured by the Master's promise that clarity of understanding will be achieved in due course. The friends, both women and men, must accept this with faith that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh will aid them and the institutions of His World Order to see the realization of every principle ordained by His unerring Pen, including the equality of men and women, as expounded in the Writings of the Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



16 June 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS CONVEY TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH THROUGHOUT WORLD JOYFUL NEWS FIRST MEETING NEWLY APPOINTED INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER.

ON MORNING OF FRIDAY THIRD JUNE THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM AND 'ALÍ AKBAR FURÚTAN, THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND THE NINE COUNSELOR MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER GATHERED IN BAHJÍ AND ENTERED THE MOST HOLY SHRINE FOR PRAYERS BEFORE PROCEEDING TO THE MANSION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH WHERE THEIR FIRST JOINT MEETING WAS HELD IN ROOM ASSOCIATED WITH SHOGHI EFFENDI. ALL WERE ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE INESTIMABLE BLESSING OF INITIATING THEIR CONSULTATIONS IN THESE SACRED PRECINCTS.

IN THIS AND SUBSEQUENT CONSULTATIONS DURING THE DAYS WHICH FOLLOWED, THE TASKS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER IN FACE OF THE TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING NOW BEFORE THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD WERE REVIEWED, AND NEW PATTERNS OF OPERATION WERE FORMULATED.

REJOICE NEW VISTAS OPENING FOR VICTORIOUS PROMOTION CAUSE GOD.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Department of the Secretariat

25 July 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 30 March 1988 has been received by The Universal House of Justice and we have been asked to respond as follows.

It is abundantly evident, from innumerable passages in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, that His Message is intended for the whole of mankind and that every nation and race in human society should regard Him as a Manifestation of God Whose teachings are directed to their upliftment and happiness. He has written that "The summons and the message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only." The people of minority backgrounds who have experienced oppression and subjugation might well contemplate the words of Bahá'u'lláh in which He states that "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." The Bahá'í community should regard itself as having been commissioned by Bahá'u'lláh to deliver His Message to the whole of humankind, in obedience to His injunction to "Proclaim the Cause of thy Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth." Such considerations should guide the Canadian Bahá'í community in disabusing the Native people of the misconception that the Bahá'í Faith represents one of the "outside agencies" which are perceived as not having the best interests of the Native community at heart.

Your letter raises the issue of cultural diversity within the Bahá'í community. The Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful world society. The House of Justice supports the view that in every country the cultural traditions of the people should be observed within the Bahá'í community as long as they are not contrary to the Teachings. The general attitude of the Faith towards the traditional practices of various peoples is expressed in the following statement of Shoghi Effendi's, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, U.S. 1982 edition, pages 41-42.

Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the worldwide Law of Bahá'u'lláh.... It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world.... Its watchword is unity in diversity such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explained:

“Consider the flowers of a garden.... Diversity of hues, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof....”

Of course, many cultural elements everywhere inevitably will disappear or be merged with related ones from their societies, yet the totality will achieve that promised diversity within world unity. We can expect much cultural diversity in the long period before the emergence of a world commonwealth of nations in the Golden Age of Bahá'u'lláh's new world order. Much wisdom and tolerance will be required, and much time must elapse until the advent of that great day.

A Bahá'í community in a Native area of Canada, seeking to maintain the distinctive features of the Native culture, must doubtless find it on many occasions confronted with the question of whether or not it should participate in traditional activities, such as festivals, which may be regarded as having a religious origin long ago....

When a Spiritual Assembly is faced with questions of possible conflict between tribal practices and Bahá'í law, it should distinguish between aspects of tribal community life which are related to fundamental laws (such as monogamy) and matters of lesser importance, from which the friends can and should extricate themselves gradually. Furthermore, the House of Justice has offered the advice that the institutions of the Faith should be careful not to press the friends to arbitrarily discard those local traditions which are harmless and often colorful characteristics of particular peoples and tribes. Were a new Bahá'í suddenly to cease following the customs of his people, it is possible that they might misunderstand the true nature of the Bahá'í Faith, and the Bahá'ís could be regarded as having turned against the traditions of the land. However, Bahá'ís should exercise vigilance, with the aid of the institutions of the Faith, to avoid inadvertent involvement in events which appear at first sight to be purely cultural and traditional in nature, but which are, in fact, held as a cover for politically oriented gatherings. The weaning away of the Bahá'ís from customs and traditions which have been established among communities for centuries takes time and is a gradual process. While an Assembly should avoid rigidity in these matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and its integrity and independence are at stake.

You have also raised a number of questions concerning the rights of indigenous people such as the Natives of Canada. It is quite clear that Native persons are fully entitled to all the human rights accorded to the majority population; for example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should be eliminated. However, the freedom for indigenous people to exercise their rights carries with it the corollary need to recognize the rights of all others to the same expression. The implications for indigenous people also include: realization of the virtues of cross-cultural influences; appreciation of the values of other cultures as accruing to the wealth of human experience and the freedom of all to share in such values without necessarily giving up their respective identities; avoidance of parochial attitudes which degenerate into ethnic and cultural prejudices; and, above all, appreciation of the necessity to maintain a global perspective within which the particulars of indigenous expression can find an enduring context. From a Bahá'í perspective it would not be proper for indigenous people to make a special claim to exclusive rights and privileges which exceed the

necessity to redress injustices. The Bahá'í attitude is guided by the statement of Bahá'u'lláh's that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The Bahá'í approach to eradication of the multitude of problems afflicting mankind, including the oppressive treatment of indigenous people, is outlined in the enclosed letter of 15 June 1987 written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í couple in ... , a copy of which was sent to you at that time. Your attention is directed to the emphasis upon the achievement of unity as a basis for an enduring resolution of the problems of mankind. It should also be noted that while Bahá'ís are called upon not to take partisan political action in their quest for their rights or for the correction of injustices they have experienced, they are free to take legal action or to appeal to administrative agencies for their rights. It is the responsibility of the Bahá'ís, in their contact with the Native people, to explain that the Bahá'í approach, far from being indifferent to the real needs of disadvantaged peoples, represents a fundamental solution derived from the diagnosis by the All-Knowing Physician of the manifold ills of human society....

In addition, enclosed is a letter of 14 January 1988 written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Mariana Islands, which addresses a number of issues arising from their concerns about the relationship with an indigenous rights movement in the Mariana Islands. Your attention is directed to the third paragraph of this letter, which deals with the question of Bahá'í statements on issues associated with indigenous rights, and which relates directly to some questions raised in your letter of 30 March 1988.

The final point made in your letter concerns the use of the Bahá'í system of administration as an example of how an Indian community should conduct its affairs, in light of the fact that the Bahá'ís may soon be the majority of the people in some Native communities. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out, in response to questions from Bahá'í communities in which there has been large-scale growth in village areas, that Bahá'í administration and the civil administration are two separate entities; the Local Spiritual Assembly does not automatically become the village council even though most, or even all, of the citizens of a village are Bahá'ís. However, the Bahá'ís in a village, irrespective of their numbers, can well offer, by precept and by their own practice, the model of consultation as an ideal means by which human beings may carry out their collective decision-making within the framework of the oneness of mankind.

When the Bahá'í community in a village is a significant proportion of the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village. Among the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult literacy and the training of women to better discharge their responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances. No doubt other possibilities will present themselves to the village Bahá'í community and its Local Spiritual Assembly.

The House of Justice commends the diligent efforts being made by your Assembly to address the issues associated with presentation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to the dearly loved Native people of Canada and the consolidation of their communities. It will offer prayers in the Holy Shrines for the success of your endeavors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

30 September 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *A Chaste and Holy Life*, which was prepared by the Research Department at the request of The Universal House of Justice.

Given the rapidly declining moral standards in the world, the House of Justice has instructed us to emphasize that it considers it both necessary and timely for the Bahá'í friends to increase their understanding of and adherence to the standard of a chaste and holy life that is upheld in our Teachings. To this end, the House of Justice urges the National Spiritual Assemblies to make the compilation available to the friends on the widest possible scale, having it translated, as necessary, in whole or in part, into the major languages of the country. It is also important that the friends be encouraged to study the implications set forth in these extracts, and to endeavor strenuously to exemplify these noble standards in their personal lives.

As the range of activities and projects in which the Bahá'í community engages necessarily continues to expand and diversify, the House of Justice believes it is vital that the moral and ethical teachings of our Faith be neither overlooked nor mistakenly regarded as being of less importance than our social, administrative and metaphysical teachings. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, stressed the need for such balance and for according appropriate weight to the moral principles of the Faith.

Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be overemphasized.

In the current climate of social and moral decline, at a time when, in the world at large, moral decay, hypocrisy and compromise are endemic, and words, unsupported by actions, have lost their value, the believers are challenged to become "Bahá'ís in character as well as in belief," to strive determinedly to exemplify the Bahá'í standard, to become distinguished for their moral excellence, and, by the quality of their individual lives and the nature of their Bahá'í community life, to demonstrate the vitalizing power of the Cause not only to bring peace, security and true spiritual happiness to the individual heart, but to

transform society as well. Shoghi Effendi repeatedly emphasized the importance of the force of example. A letter written on his behalf states:

His constant hope is that the believers will conduct themselves, individually and in their Bahá'í Community life, in such a manner as to attract the attention of others to the Cause. The world is not only starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a shining example which the Bahá'ís can and must provide.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Department of the Secretariat

13 December 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is with heavy heart that The Universal House of Justice instructed us to inform you that two believers who had been imprisoned in Iran for some time, have recently been executed.

Mr. Bihnám Páshá'í, a resident of Simnán and member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of that city, had been arrested on 19 November 1983 in Tehran. In the summer of 1988 he was transferred to Evin prison and his family has not been permitted to see him since July 1988. The news of his execution was communicated to his family on 3 December 1988. He was 49 years old.

Mr. Páshá'í was from a Muslim family and accepted the Faith some years ago, the only member of his family to do so. It is assumed that this was the reason for his execution, for the authorities in Iran are known to be very severe on those who independently accept the Faith, considering them to be apostates according to Islamic law.

The other Bahá'í recently executed was Mr. Íraj Afshín. He was arrested late in 1986 and his family has not been allowed to see him since 17 July 1988. News of his execution was given to his family on 26 November 1988. He was 55 years old.

Mr. Afshín was a colonel in the Iranian Air Force, and the authorities maintain that his execution was on political grounds due to his connections with royalists, members of a group opposed to the Government. It is established, however, that Mr. Afshín had not engaged in political activities, that he firmly maintained his faith throughout his imprisonment, and that he was assigned to a prison ward where other Bahá'ís were kept.

To date, neither the exact charges, nor the dates of execution nor the places of burial are known for these two latest victims.

It was also reported that 36 Bahá'í prisoners had recently been in great danger of execution. They were housed in a prison ward together with many mujaheddin and communists. One night, when their fellow prisoners were rounded up for execution, the 36 Bahá'ís were also taken out with them, blindfolded and lined up to be shot. Among them were two very old Bahá'ís, Mr. Vafá'í of Isfahan and Mr. Mazlúmí of



Sangsar. Casually, one of the guards asked these two men what they had done at their age to deserve being shot. They answered that they were Bahá'ís, whereupon their executioners said that they had no orders to shoot Bahá'ís. Fortunately, the other Bahá'ís overheard these remarks and all stepped forward identifying themselves as such and, in this way, they were spared....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

29 December 1988

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have noticed with concern evidences of a confusion of attitudes among some of the friends when they encounter difficulties in applying Bahá'í principles to questions of the day. On the one hand, they acknowledge their belief in Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings; on the other, they invoke Western liberal democratic practices when actions of Bahá'í institutions or of some of their fellow Bahá'ís do not accord with their expectations. At the heart of this confusion are misconceptions of such fundamental issues as individual rights and freedom of expression in the Bahá'í community. The source of the potential difficulties of the situation appears to us to be an inadequacy of Bahá'í perspective on the part of both individual believers and their institutions.

Recognizing the immense challenge you face to resolve such confusion, we pause to reflect with you on these issues in search of a context in which relevant fundamental questions may be discussed and understood in the community.

The extraordinary capacities of the American nation, as well as the superb stewardship of the Bahá'í community within it, have repeatedly been extolled in the writings of our Faith. In His Tablets and utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, projected a compelling vision of the world-embracing prospects of that richly endowed country. "The American nation," He averred, "is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world, and be blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people." In another assertion addressed to the Bahá'í community itself, He uttered words of transcendent importance: "... your mission," He affirmed, "is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a center from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and the throne of the Kingdom of God will, in the plenitude of its majesty and glory, be firmly established."

Shoghi Effendi, in various statements, celebrated the remarkable achievements and potential glories of that specially blessed community, but was moved to issue, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a profound warning which is essential to a proper understanding of the relation of that Bahá'í community to the nation from which it has sprung. "The glowing tributes," he solemnly wrote, "so repeatedly and deservedly paid to the capacity, the spirit, the conduct, and the high rank, of the American believers, both individually and as an organic community, must, under no circumstances, be confounded with the characteristics and nature of the people from which God has raised them up. A sharp distinction between that community and that people must be made, and resolutely and fearlessly upheld, if we wish to give due recognition to the

transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, in its impact on the lives and standards of those who have chosen to enlist under His banner. Otherwise, the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a new race of men, will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured." It is the far-reaching, transformative implications of this distinction which we especially invite you to contemplate.

The vantage point that gives us perspective and is the foundation of our belief and actions rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God and our submission to His will as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, His supreme Manifestation for this promised Day. To accept the Prophet of God in His time and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfill. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, an act constituting the highest expression of the free will with which every human being has been endowed by an all-loving Creator.

The vehicle in this resplendent Age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh; it is, indeed, the potent instrument by which individual belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds. The Covenant comprises divinely conceived arrangements necessary to preserve the organic unity of the Cause. It therefore engenders a motivating power which, as the beloved Master tells us, "like unto the artery, beats and pulsates in the body of the world." "It is indubitably clear," He asserts, "that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant." Through it the meaning of the Word, both in theory and practice, is made evident in the life and work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Interpreter, the perfect Exemplar, the Center of the Covenant. Through it the processes of the Administrative Order—"this unique, this wondrous System"—are made to operate.

In emphasizing its distinctiveness, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out that "this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances." In another statement, he maintains that "It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, divinely conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions." "Such an attempt," he felt, "would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author."

The lack of such appreciation will detract from the perspective of anyone who measures Bahá'í administrative processes against practices prevalent in today's society. For notwithstanding its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs, and regardless of the resemblance of some of its features to those of other systems, the Administrative Order is not to be viewed merely as an improvement on past and existing systems; it represents a departure both in origin and in concept. "This newborn Administrative Order," as Shoghi Effendi has explained, "incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government

fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.”

You are, no doubt, conversant with the Guardian’s expatiations on this theme. Why, then, this insistent emphasis? Why this repeated review of fundamentals? This emphasis, this review, is to sound an appeal for solid thinking, for the attainment of correct perspectives, for the adoption of proper attitudes. And these are impossible without a deep appreciation of Bahá’í fundamentals.

The great emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh is not meant to belittle existing systems of government. Indeed, they are to be recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an advanced stage in the development of social organization. What motivates us is the knowledge that the supreme mission of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, the Bearer of that Order, is, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations,” indicating the “coming of age of the entire human race.” The astounding implication of this is the near prospect of attaining an age-old hope, now made possible at long last by the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. In practical terms, His mission signals the advent of “an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.” It is a fresh manifestation of the direct involvement of God in history, a reassurance that His children have not been left to drift, a sign of the outpouring of a heavenly grace that will enable all humanity to be free at last from conflict and contention to ascend the heights of world peace and divine civilization. Beyond all else, it is a demonstration of that love for His children, which He knew in the depth of His “immemorial being” and in the “ancient eternity” of His Essence, and which caused Him to create us all. In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His World Order is a reciprocation of that love.

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It is this perspective that helps us to understand the question of freedom and its place in Bahá’í thought and action. The idea and the fact of freedom pervade all human concerns in an infinitude of notions and modes. Freedom is indeed essential to all expressions of human life.

Freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of action are among the freedoms which have received the ardent attention of social thinkers across the centuries. The resulting outflow of such profound thought has exerted a tremendous liberating influence in the shaping of modern society. Generations of the oppressed have fought and died in the name of freedom. Certainly the want of freedom from oppression has been a dominant factor in the turmoil of the times: witness the plethora of movements which have resulted in the rapid emergence of new nations in the latter part of the twentieth century. A true reading of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh leaves no doubt as to the high importance of these freedoms to constructive social processes. Consider, for instance, Bahá’u’lláh’s proclamation to the kings and rulers. Can it not be deduced from this alone that attainment of freedom is a significant purpose of His Revelation? His denunciations of tyranny and His urgent appeals on behalf of the oppressed provide unmistakable proof. But does not the freedom foreshadowed by His Revelation imply nobler, ampler manifestations of human

achievement? Does it not indicate an organic relationship between the internal and external realities of man such as has not yet been attained?

In his summary of significant Bahá'í teachings, Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'u'lláh "inculcates the principle of 'moderation in all things'; declares that whatsoever, be it 'liberty, civilization and the like,' 'passeth beyond the limits of moderation' must 'exercise a pernicious influence upon men'; observes that western civilization has gravely perturbed and alarmed the peoples of the world; and predicts that the day is approaching when the 'flame' of a civilization 'carried to excess' 'will devour the cities.'"

Expounding the theme of liberty, Bahá'u'lláh asserted that "the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal"; that "liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station"; that "true liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments." "We approve of liberty in certain circumstances," He declared, "and refuse to sanction it in others." But He gave the assurance that, "Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty." And again, He said, "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."

Bahá'u'lláh's assertions clearly call for an examination of current assumptions. Should liberty be as free as is supposed in contemporary Western thought? Where does freedom limit our possibilities for progress, and where do limits free us to thrive? What are the limits to the expansion of freedom? For so fluid and elastic are its qualities of application and expression that the concept of freedom in any given situation is likely to assume a different latitude from one mind to another; these qualities are, alas, susceptible to the employment alike of good and evil. Is it any wonder, then, that Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to submission to the will of God?

Since any constructive view of freedom implies limits, further questions are inevitable: What are the latitudes of freedom in the Bahá'í community? How are these to be determined? Because human beings have been created to "carry forward an ever-advancing civilization," the exercise of freedom, it may be deduced, is intended to enable all to fulfill this purpose in their individual lives and in their collective functioning as a society. Hence whatever in principle is required to realize this purpose gauges the latitudes or limits of freedom.

Contemplating Bahá'u'lláh's warning that "whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence," we come to appreciate that the Administrative Order He has conceived embodies the operating principles which are necessary to the maintenance of that moderation which will ensure the "true liberty" of humankind. All things considered, does the Administrative Order not appear to be the structure of freedom for our Age? 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers us comfort in this thought, for He has said that "the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh."

Within this framework of freedom a pattern is set for institutional and individual behavior which depends for its efficacy not so much on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals—these being expressions of their devotion and submission to the will of God. Thus there is a balance of freedom between the institution, whether national or local, and the individuals who sustain its existence.

Consider, for example, the Local Spiritual Assembly, the methods of its formation and the role of individuals in electing it. The voter elects with the understanding that he is free to choose without any interference whomever his conscience prompts him to select, and he freely accepts the authority of the outcome. In the act of voting, the individual subscribes to a covenant by which the orderliness of society is upheld. The Assembly has the responsibility to guide, direct and decide on community affairs and the right to be obeyed and supported by members of the community. The individual has the responsibility to establish and maintain the Assembly through election, the offering of advice, moral support and material assistance; and he has the right to be heard by it, to receive its guidance and assistance, and to appeal from any Assembly decision which he conscientiously feels is unjust or detrimental to the interests of the community.

But occupation with the mechanics of Bahá'í Administration, divorced from the animating spirit of the Cause, leads to a distortion, to an arid secularization foreign to the nature of the Administration. Equally significant to the procedures for election—to further extend the example—is the evocation of that rarefied atmosphere of prayer and reflection, that quiet dignity of the process, devoid of nominations and campaigning, in which the individual's freedom to choose is limited only by his own conscience, exercised in private in an attitude that invites communion with the Holy Spirit. In this sphere, the elector regards the outcome as an expression of the will of God, and those elected as being primarily responsible to that will, not to the constituency which elected them. An election thus conducted portrays an aspect of that organic unity of the inner and outer realities of human life which is necessary to the construction of a mature society in this new Age. In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of freedom in the electoral process.

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The equilibrium of responsibilities implied by all this presupposes maturity on the part of all concerned. This maturity has an apt analogy in adulthood in human beings. How significant is the difference between infancy and childhood, adolescence and adulthood! In a period of history dominated by the surging energy, the rebellious spirit and frenetic activity of adolescence, it is difficult to grasp the distinguishing elements of the mature society to which Bahá'u'lláh beckons all humanity. The models of the old world order blur vision of that which must be perceived; for these models were, in many instances, conceived in rebellion and retain the characteristics of the revolutions peculiar to an adolescent, albeit necessary, period in the evolution of human society. The very philosophies which have provided the intellectual content of such revolutions—Hobbes, Locke, Jefferson, Mill come readily to mind—were inspired by protest against the oppressive conditions which revolutions were intended to remedy.

These characteristics are conspicuous, for example, in the inordinate skepticism regarding authority, and consequently, in the grudging respect which the citizens of various nations show toward their governments; they have become pronounced in the incessant promotion of individualism, often to the detriment of the wider interests of society. How aptly, even after the lapse of half a century, Shoghi Effendi's views, as conveyed by his secretary, fit the contemporary scene: "Our present generation, mainly due to the corruptions that have been identified with organizations, seem to stand against any institution. Religion as an institution is denounced. Government as an institution is denounced. Even marriage as an institution is denounced. We Bahá'ís should not be blinded by such prevalent notions. If such were the case, all the divine Manifestations would not have invariably appointed someone to succeed Them. Undoubtedly, corruptions did enter those institutions, but these corruptions were not due to the very nature of the institutions but to the lack of proper directions as to their powers and nature of their perpetuation. What Bahá'u'lláh has done is not to eliminate all institutions in the Cause but to provide the necessary safeguards that would eliminate corruptions that caused the fall of previous institutions. What those safeguards are is most interesting to study and find out and also most essential to know."

We make these observations not to indulge in criticism of any system, but rather to open up lines of thought, to encourage a reexamination of the bases of modern society, and to engender a perspective for consideration of the distinctive features of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. What, it could be asked, was the nature of society that gave rise to such characteristics and such philosophies? Where have these taken mankind? Has their employment satisfied the needs and expectations of the human spirit? The answers to such questions could lay the ground for a contrasting observation of the origin and nature of the characteristics and philosophy underlying that Order.

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As to freedom of expression, a fundamental principle of the Cause, the Administrative Order provides unique methods and channels for its exercise and maintenance; these have been amply described in the writings of the Faith, but they are not yet clearly understood by the friends. For Bahá'u'lláh has extended the scope and deepened the meaning of self-expression. In His elevation of art and of work performed in the service of humanity to acts of worship can be discerned enormous prospects for a new birth of expression in the civilization anticipated by His World Order. The significance of this principle, now so greatly amplified by the Lord of the Age, cannot be doubted; but it is in its ramifications in speech that keen understanding is urgently needed. From a Bahá'í point of view, the exercise of freedom of speech must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of speech, on the other.

Bahá'u'lláh warns us that "the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison." "Material fire consumeth the body," He says in elaborating the point, "whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century." In tracing the framework of free speech, He again advises "moderation." "Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation," He states, adding, "As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached

and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.”

Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech, as for so many other things, there is a season. Bahá'u'lláh reinforces this understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that “Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.”

Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgment, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination of the principles of Bahá'í consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression.

As it is beyond the scope of this letter to expatiate upon these principles, let it suffice to recall briefly certain of the requisites of consultation, particularly for those who serve on Spiritual Assemblies. Love and harmony, purity of motive, humility and lowliness amongst the friends, patience and long-suffering in difficulties—these inform the attitude with which they proceed “with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views,” each using “perfect liberty” both in so doing and in “unveiling the proof of his demonstration.” “If another contradicts him, he must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither understood.” “The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.” If unanimity is not subsequently achieved, decisions are arrived at by majority vote.

Once a decision has been reached, all members of the consultative body, having had the opportunity fully to state their views, agree wholeheartedly to support the outcome. What if the minority view is right? “If they agree upon a subject,” Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, “even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree, that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity, the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.” Implicit in this approach to the social utility of thought is the profundity of the change in the standard of public discussion intended by Bahá'u'lláh for a mature society.

The qualities by which the individual can achieve the personal discipline necessary to successful consultation find their full expression in what Shoghi Effendi regarded as the “spirit of a true Bahá'í.” Ponder, for instance, the appealing remark addressed to your own community in one of his earliest letters: “Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.” This was an appeal to the maturity and the distinction towards which he repeatedly directed their thoughts.



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Because the Most Great Peace is the object of our longing, a primary effort of the Bahá'í community is to reduce the incidence of conflict and contention, which are categorically forbidden in the Most Holy Book. Does this mean that one may not express critical thought? Absolutely not. How can there be the candor called for in consultation if there is no critical thought? How is the individual to exercise his responsibilities to the Cause, if he is not allowed the freedom to express his views? Has Shoghi Effendi not stated that "at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views"?

The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that "it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community." Correspondingly, the Assembly has the duty "to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them."

Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or national, or to a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member, there are specific occasions for the airing of one's views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá'í is the Nineteen Day Feast which, "besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í community." At the same time, Shoghi Effendi's advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that "all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community."

Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic's right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved, the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded, authority being an indispensable aspect of freedom. Motive, manner, mode, become relevant; but there is also the matter of love: love for one's fellows, love for one's community, love for one's institutions.

The responsibility resting on the individual to conduct himself in such a way as to ensure the stability of society takes on elemental importance in this context. For vital as it is to the progress of society, criticism is a two-edged sword: it is all too often the harbinger of conflict and contention. The balanced processes of the Administrative Order are meant to prevent this essential activity from degenerating to any form of dissent that breeds opposition and its dreadful schismatic consequences. How incalculable have been the negative results of ill-directed criticism: in the catastrophic divergences it has created in religion, in the equally contentious factions it has spawned in political systems, which have dignified conflict by institutionalizing such concepts as the "loyal opposition" which attach to one or another of the various categories of political opinion—conservative, liberal, progressive, reactionary, and so forth.

If Bahá'í individuals deliberately ignore the principles imbedded in the Order which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has established to remedy divisiveness in the human family, the Cause for which so much has been sacrificed will surely be set back in its mission to rescue world society from complete disintegration. May not the existence of the Covenant be invoked again and again, so that such repetition may preserve the needed perspective? For, in this age, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has been protected against the baneful effects of the misuse of the process of criticism; this has been done by the institution of the Covenant and by the provision of a universal administrative system which incorporates within itself the mechanisms for drawing out the constructive ideas of individuals and using them for the benefit of the entire system. Admonishing the people to uphold the unifying purpose of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, addresses these poignant words to them: "Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord." Such assertions emphasize a crucial point; it is this: In terms of the Covenant, dissidence is a moral and intellectual contradiction of the main objective animating the Bahá'í community, namely, the establishment of the unity of mankind.

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We return to the phenomenal characteristics of speech. Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously. Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this discipline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word; and it profoundly affects the operation of the press.

The significance and role of the press in a new world system are conspicuous in the emphasis which the Order of Bahá'u'lláh places on accessibility to information at all levels of society. Shoghi Effendi tells us that Bahá'u'lláh makes "specific reference to 'the swiftly appearing newspapers,' describes them as 'the mirror of the world' and as 'an amazing and potent phenomenon,' and prescribes to all who are responsible for their production the duty to be sanctified from malice, passion and prejudice, to be just and fair-minded, to be painstaking in their inquiries, and ascertain all the facts in every situation."

In His social treatise, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers insight as to the indispensability of the press in future society. He says it is "urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society." Further, He writes of the "publication of high thoughts" as the "dynamic power in the arteries of life," "the very soul of the world." Moreover, He states that "Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs."

As to manner and style, Bahá'u'lláh has exhorted "authors among the friends" to "write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to caviling by the people." And He issues a reminder: "We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to

become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither.”

In the light of all this, the code of conduct of the press must embrace the principles and objectives of consultation as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Only in this way will the press be able to make its full contribution to the preservation of the rights of the people and become a powerful instrument in the consultative processes of society, and hence for the unity of the human race.

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Some of the friends have suggested that the emergence of the Faith from obscurity indicates the timeliness of ceasing observance in the Bahá'í community of certain restraints; particularly are they concerned about the temporary necessity of review before publishing.

That the Faith has emerged from obscurity on a global scale is certain. This definitely marks a triumphant stage in the efforts of the community to register its existence on the minds of those who influence world events. Consider how, because of the sufferings and sacrifices of the friends in Iran, the concerns of the community in these respects have become a matter of discussion in the most influential parliaments and the most important international forums on earth. That this emergence frees the Cause to pursue objectives hitherto unreachable is also undeniable; but that it marks the attainment of the community's anticipated maturity is entirely doubtful.

How could it have attained maturity, when we know from the clear guidance of the beloved Guardian that obscurity is but one of the many stages in the long evolution towards the Faith's golden destiny? Has he not advised us all that the subsequent stage of oppression must precede the stages of its emancipation and its recognition as a world religion? Can the friends forget the oft-quoted warning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the bitter opposition that will confront the Cause in various lands on all continents? In the case of the American believers, has Shoghi Effendi not alluded to this coming fury in his description of them as “the invincible Army of Bahá'u'lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm centers is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles”?

Those who are anxious to relax all restraint, who invoke freedom of speech as the rationale for publishing every and any thing concerning the Bahá'í community, who call for the immediate termination of the practice of review now that the Faith has emerged from obscurity—are they not aware of these sobering prospects? Widespread as has been the public revulsion to the current persecutions in Iran, let there be no mistake about the certainty of the opposition which must yet be confronted in many countries, including that which is the Cradle of the Administrative Order itself.

The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity, even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its existence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Bahá'ís. The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas heretofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in various

quarters. So, far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public. A greater effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.

Let us all remember that the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive is beset with the turmoil of the present age. Like a tender shoot just barely discernible above ground, it must be nurtured to strength and maturity and buttressed as necessary against the blight of strong winds and deadly entanglements with weeds and thistles. If we to whose care this plant has been entrusted are insensitive to its tenderness, the great tree which is its certain potential will be hindered in its growth towards the spreading of its sheltering branches over all humankind. From this perspective we must all consider the latent danger to the Cause of ill-advised actions and exaggerated expectations; and particularly must we all be concerned about the effects of words, especially those put in print. It is here that Bahá'í authors and publishers need to be attentive and exert rigorous discipline upon themselves, as well as abide by the requirements of review at this early stage in the development of the Faith.

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The right of the individual to self-expression has permeated the foregoing comments on the various freedoms, but, even so, a word more might be said about individual freedom. The fundamental attitude of the Faith in this respect is best demonstrated by statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the family. "The integrity of the family bond," He says, "must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed.... All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all."

The individual's relation to society is explained by Shoghi Effendi in the statement that "The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the 'golden mean.'"

This relationship, so fundamental to the maintenance of civilized life, calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between society and the individual; and because of the need to foster a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop, this relationship must allow "free scope" for "individuality to assert itself" through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society. Among the responsibilities assigned to Bahá'í institutions which have a direct bearing on these aspects of individual freedom and development is one which is thus described in the Constitution of The Universal House of Justice: "to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals." A corollary is: "to give attention to the preservation of human honor."

How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, while the individual will is subordinated to that of society, the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an individual finds fulfillment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and with the divinely ordained purpose of creation.

The quality of freedom and of its expression—indeed, the very capacity to maintain freedom in a society—undoubtedly depends on the knowledge and training of individuals and on their ability to cope with the challenges of life with equanimity. As the beloved Master has written: “And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellowmen? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.”

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The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh. His own words confirm it. “The Ancient Beauty,” He wrote in a soul-stirring commentary on His sufferings, “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.”

Might it not be reasonably concluded, then, that “true liberty” is His gift of love to the human race? Consider what Bahá'u'lláh has done: He revealed laws and principles to guide the free; He established an Order to channel the actions of the free; He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity of the free.

Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Bahá'u'lláh came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.

You who live in a land where freedom is so highly prized have not, then, to dispense with its fruits, but you are challenged and do have the obligation to uphold and vindicate the distinction between the license that limits your possibilities for genuine progress and the moderation that ensures the enjoyment of true liberty.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

**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 Ridván 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 Şahbá 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 Center 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 cosponsorship by the Bahá'í International Community of the "Arts for Nature" program 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 nongovernmental 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 Riqḍán: 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 Counselors, 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

22 June 1989

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice wrote to you on 21 September 1988 expressing its concern about the conditions existing within your Assembly and asking for views and recommendations to be sent to it by members of the National Spiritual Assembly individually. A number of responses have been received, along with additional information requested by the House of Justice from other sources. We have been directed to convey to you the following.

One of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which stands in striking contrast to the administrative systems associated with past Dispensations, is the responsibility it places upon the individual believer to participate in its activities. In contrast to the members of congregations of many other religions whose role is principally that of being the recipients of instruction and advice from their ecclesiastical leaders, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are called upon, in their relationships within the community, to engage in consultation, to follow closely the affairs of the Faith in their region, to offer their views and recommendations on all matters which pertain to the interests of the Faith and its community, and to elect the Spiritual Assemblies and cooperate wholeheartedly with them. This active involvement by every Bahá'í in the life of the community provides it with access to each individual's insight and wisdom and is a source of great strength to the organic unit.

Membership on an Assembly imposes upon the believer the spiritual responsibility to become an active participant in its work, to be fully informed of its endeavors, and to ensure that its functioning is in accord with Bahá'í principles. Every Assembly member should recognize that he has a duty to ensure that his voice is heard and that appropriate consideration is given to his views. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that consultation succeeds in avoiding "ill-feeling or discord" when "every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument," with the further affirmation by the Guardian that "it is not only the right but the sacred obligation of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid of displeasing or alienating any of his fellow members," and "The Assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express wholehearted and unqualified obedience to the well considered judgment and directions of the majority of their fellow members."

No member of an Assembly should feel inhibited from participating in the consultation because of what he may believe to be deficiencies in his education, experience or knowledge of the Faith. Rather he should rely with unshakeable faith on the divine confirmations which will bestow wisdom and guidance upon the

sincere believer who approaches his assigned functions in a spirit of consecration and humility, beseeching the aid of the Omniscient Lord. He should also be guided by the observation of the Guardian: "Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given assembly."

If an Assembly member feels that there are barriers affecting the consultation of the body, he should frankly and courageously raise his concerns; these barriers could include, for example, the consultation moving at a speed which confuses him, language being used which he cannot understand, behavioral characteristics which unwittingly express condescension leading to the humiliation of others, or a feeling that one is being ignored. Such barriers may well arise as the Faith continues its inexorable progress in creating dynamic consultative bodies which bring together, in a spirit of unity and equality, the historically divided elements of humanity, thus laying the foundation for a new and ever advancing civilization.

It is the responsibility of all members of an Assembly to ensure that its officers are elected properly, function correctly and discharge their duties in accordance with the decisions of the Assembly. If a member feels, for example, that the meetings are not chaired effectively, that the minutes are not an accurate report of the decisions made at the meeting, or that the correspondence of the secretary or the financial transactions carried out by the treasurer do not conform to the instructions of the Assembly, he should bring this matter up at the Assembly meeting, taking care to ensure that this is done with appropriate moderation, courtesy and balance.

The Universal House of Justice trusts that these clarifications will assist your Assembly to improve the quality of your consultation and the effectiveness of your functioning. It requests you to ensure that copies of this letter are provided to each member of the Assembly, and that translations are provided if any individual members of the Assembly feel that this would facilitate their understanding of it. When all members have had an opportunity to study the letter, you should arrange a special session of the Assembly for consultation on its contents. You may also wish to seek the advice of the Counselors on measures to be taken to carry out more fully its provisions.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

10 July 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Holy Word has been extolled by the Prophets of God as the medium of celestial power and the wellspring of all spiritual, social and material progress. Access to it, constant study of it and daily use of it in our individual lives are vital to the inner personal transformation towards which we strive and whose ultimate outer manifestation will be the emergence of that divine civilization which is the promise of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The blessings which flow from the Word of God are implicit in this instruction of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of His Revelation: "Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths." Again in the same book, He bids us recite the "verses of God every morning and evening." An astonishing insight as to the sublime influence of the revealed Word is conveyed in this further instruction gleaned from one of His Tablets: "Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul."

The most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word is through reading. The ability to read is therefore a fundamental right and privilege of every human being. Bahá'u'lláh promotes this right in His command to parents to ensure the instruction of their sons and daughters in the "art of reading and writing." For this essential reason, in our last Ridván message we called attention to the need for systematic attention to be given to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá'í community. This matter must assume its proper importance as a continuing objective of that community.

Let each National and Local Spiritual Assembly, according to necessity and circumstance, address itself to this objective, conscious that even where total achievement is not immediately possible, opportunities must be sought to make steady progress. Let each be confident that the shining example set by Iran, the mother community of the Bahá'í world, under the inspiration of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the urging of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, upholds a standard all can follow. In the earliest years of this century, when no systematic, overall plan of education existed in Iran, the Bahá'ís seized their chance and organized a widespread program of education. Its teachers were distinguished for their ability to foster child, youth and adult education, which led to significant self-improvement among the Iranian Bahá'ís. The emergence of a literate Bahá'í community was an outstanding result.

Some local or national Bahá'í communities may wish to follow the example of those who have already instituted their own literacy projects and are achieving notable success; others may wish to participate in literacy programs organized by governmental or nongovernmental organizations. Each community will have to determine whether to engage in one or the other, or to do both. Progress will depend not only on the initiatives of Bahá'í institutions in relation to children, but also on the active interest of adult believers

who want to learn to read. Such friends should definitely be encouraged and assisted to achieve, with dignity, their heart's desire. Certainly, the willing participation of the friends in an undertaking of such importance to the upliftment of individuals and the consolidation of the Bahá'í community as a whole will attract divine favors and confirmations.

The United Nations has declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year so as to mobilize an all-out, ongoing effort to eradicate illiteracy around the world. The literacy projects already in progress in the Bahá'í community, and those which are yet to be adopted, will surely lend support to this noble and necessary effort. Therefore, we commend the purpose of this special year to the attention of the entire Bahá'í world. The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office will send National Assemblies information concerning activities associated with International Literacy Year and how Bahá'í communities may become involved. Moreover, agencies at the Bahá'í World Centre having a special interest in literacy programs will offer helpful advice as necessary, but Spiritual Assemblies need not wait to hear from them before proceeding with their own plans.

We look forward with confident expectation to your achievements toward the ultimate fulfillment of this objective which is so essential to the progress of the Bahá'í community and indeed all humanity. And we assure you, as ever, of our continuing prayers at the Holy Shrines for your success.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

27 August 1989

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. It occupied much of the consultation at the Sixth International Bahá'í Convention last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.

"If this feast be held in the proper fashion," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endowed with a power that is not of this world." To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Center and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual friends, in response to Bahá'u'lláh's injunctions, hosted gatherings in their homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration from the reading and

discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew, 'Abdu'l-Bahá delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

But it is not only in the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life—acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness—over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting “a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.”

Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying messages from the national and international levels of the administration and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order. But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.

If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it. Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of individuals to make preparations—a practice which is consonant with the spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts and are sometimes concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out, but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assemblies, while retaining the concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional program. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways—all play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master offers the following advice: "Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamored each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardors of the spirit."

In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in these words: "It hath been enjoined upon you once a month to offer hospitality, even should ye serve no more than water, for God hath willed to bind your hearts together, though it be through heavenly and earthly means combined." It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith labored so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.

That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a "bringer of joy," the "groundwork of agreement and unity," the "key to affection and fellowship" will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

28 August 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In addition to the accompanying letter addressed by the Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh concerning the Nineteen Day Feast, we have been asked to convey its comments on the following points with which you will have to deal in assisting the community in its observance of this important festival.

First, the House of Justice is aware that in many areas only a limited time can be devoted to the Feast by the friends, because the Feast day may come during the week when most people have to work, and the evening hours do not allow much time for its observance. While the House of Justice does not wish to deemphasize the preference expressed by Shoghi Effendi that the Feast be held on the first day of the Bahá'í month, it feels that in instances of difficulty, where the friends would otherwise be unable to attend, the National Spiritual Assembly may point out to Local Assemblies that it is permissible to hold the Feast at another time within the Bahá'í month, such as on a weekend.

Second, the administrative portion of the Feast should not be laborious or burdensome. It can become so because too many reports by too many local Bahá'í committees are presented at one Feast. Such reports could perhaps be conveyed in bulletins. Also, there can be too many messages from agencies of the national administration. While it lies within the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to send a message or items of information to be shared at the Feast, care must be taken not to overburden these events with a multiplicity of items from the National Assembly and its auxiliary agencies. Some National Assemblies have developed the practice of sending a message to every Feast; this is, of course, not wrong in principle, but they may need to examine their methods of communicating with the believers and see whether occasional messages might not be sufficient. The idea is that the local Bahá'í communities should exercise control over the Feast and not be made to feel that they are being overrun by messages, instructions and assignments from the national administration of the Faith. This whole matter needs to be studied by the National Spiritual Assembly with a balanced perspective, so that while important national issues are not ignored, the potentialities of the Feast for development of the local community are fully realized.

Third, the accompanying letter to the friends points to the desirability of the inclusion in the Feast of cultural elements which can enhance the experience without contravening Bahá'í principles. The National Spiritual Assemblies will want to be watchful that the incorporation of such elements does not lead to a

degeneration of the Feast as a uniquely Bahá'í institution and, particularly, that no objectionable customs and practices begin to creep into its observance.

We have also been asked to send you the enclosed compilation, entitled *The Nineteen Day Feast*, as a resource on which you can draw in further educating the community and in answering the questions of the friends concerning this vital institution. You are free to share its contents with the friends but you are under no obligation to publish it.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

25 September 1989

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 7 June 1989, concerning a writing project which you had been contemplating in collaboration with a professional filmmaker and writer who is not a Bahá'í, and we have been asked to send you the following reply with an expression of regret for the delay due to pressure of work.

Given the long history and overwhelming current examples of repression in the world, it is not surprising that in a country like the United States, which upholds freedom of speech as a cardinal principle, the non-Bahá'í collaborator in a filmmaking project, such as you have described, would be concerned about any perceived, or misperceived, notion of censorship. As you know, review of manuscripts before publication is a discipline which the Bahá'í community applies to its own members as a temporary necessity, for it is anticipated that in due time this practice will cease. The reason is simple: At this early stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith, which is striving against great odds to establish itself in a world that is highly critical, often antagonistic towards new ideas, and whose communications media tend to emphasize negative information, it is important that Bahá'í authors, scriptwriters and filmmakers endeavor to present the Faith with accuracy and dignity. It is one thing for a non-Bahá'í to make erroneous statements about the Faith; this can be excused on the basis of ignorance. But for a Bahá'í to make such errors is quite a different thing, because he is considered to be knowledgeable about that which he espouses.

Therefore, a Bahá'í author is expected to ensure to the extent possible a correct representation of the Faith in his work; as an aid he draws upon the reviewing facilities provided by Bahá'í institutions. A great many

authors spontaneously and informally submit their manuscripts to a type of review, although they would not necessarily call it that, when they request the comments and criticisms of persons whose expertise and judgment they respect. Submission to Bahá'í review is no greater a requirement, and may well be less demanding in most cases, than the rigorous review of scientific papers before their publication. In the same way that scientists have acceded to the discipline of review in the interest of ensuring the precision and integrity of their dissertations, Bahá'í authors respect the function of review in the Bahá'í community.

The Bahá'í Faith makes very serious claims and has a rich and complex history, but it is as yet a young religion whose precepts are not widely understood. It has been undergoing severe persecution in the land of its birth and is experiencing serious opposition in other places where its detractors have no compunction in misrepresenting its purposes. Until its history, teachings and practices are well known throughout the world, it will be necessary for the Bahá'í community to make efforts within itself to present correct information about the Faith in books, films or other media. This can and must be done without violating the principle of freedom of expression, which, according to the teachings of the Faith, is a vital right of all persons.

It is not necessary for Bahá'í authors to make an issue of the function of review with others with whom they wish to collaborate, because it is not required of non-Bahá'ís, though they can, if they wish, call upon Bahá'í reviewing facilities when dealing with Bahá'í topics. Although the function of review in the Bahá'í community is concerned with checking an author's exposition of the Faith and its teachings, this function is not to be confused with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publication, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher. With or without review, the work presented by a Bahá'í to a non-Bahá'í collaborator will, it is presumed, be judged by that collaborator on its merits.

The House of Justice hopes that these points will clarify your thoughts on the function of review in the Bahá'í community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

9 November 1989

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Hawaiian Islands

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 2 October 1989 about your laudable desire to simplify enrollment procedures and eliminate obstacles to new believers' joining the Bahá'í community. It has asked us to send you the following reply.

First, the House of Justice does not believe that the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly are intended to imply by the term "voting membership" that there are two classes of membership in the Bahá'í community, except insofar as those under the age of 21 do not have the right to vote or serve on a Spiritual Assembly.

As you well understand, there is no universally applicable procedure that a new believer must follow in making a declaration of faith. In essence, it is simply the act of making it known to the Bahá'ís that he too believes in Bahá'u'lláh, accepts the Faith, and wishes to be recognized as a member of the Bahá'í community. The process of considering and accepting such a declaration by the institutions of the Faith or their duly appointed representatives should follow as swiftly as possible. The procedure for this is left to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly, and can vary from area to area within the same country.

As you indicate in your letter, the process of issuing an enrollment card is a separate, purely formal, step that follows the above decision.

Whether a newly declared Bahá'í should be invited to attend a Nineteen Day Feast before his declaration has been accepted is a matter at the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly in light of the specific circumstances. For example, where feasible, could the Assembly not provide that, if a declaration is made so soon before a Feast that the Assembly has no time to meet to accept it, the officers would be authorized to welcome the new believer to the Feast unless they have some reason for doubting that the declaration would be accepted? In general it would seem to be better to show a loving and welcoming spirit rather than to stand on a point of administrative procedure.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

**20 November 1989**

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guyana

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 22 September 1989 raising the question of your National Spiritual Assembly's relations with the Government of Guyana, and it has requested us to convey the following.

In general, the manner in which the principle of noninterference in political affairs should be applied in Guyana depends upon your appraisal of the situation. The subject should be discussed with the friends in such a manner that they will not only understand its import for themselves, but will also see how they can positively and confidently explain it to non-Bahá'ís. The adherents of this Cause uphold the principles of loyalty and obedience to government, do not become involved in subversive activities, refrain from partisanship and do not join political parties. At the same time, as responsible citizens, they strive to promote the best interests of their respective nations and governments by making themselves productive, helpful members of society wholly committed to serving humanity for the love of God. Such considerations, while orienting the Bahá'ís to the attitudes they must adopt, should also allay the fears and suspicions of their non-Bahá'í fellow citizens, regardless of their political persuasions, concerning the outlook and intentions of the Faith. These attitudes should be neither offensive nor threatening to anyone. As the friends are seen increasingly to reflect them in their daily lives, they should gradually earn the respect and trust of all ranks and segments of society.

It is up to the National Spiritual Assembly to determine which posts and functions are "diplomatic or political and which are "purely administrative in character" and "under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve." While the former represent activities the friends must avoid, the latter functions are open to Bahá'ís. Indeed, such functions are to be welcomed by the friends as they constitute opportunities which enable them "to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country" to which they belong. (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, rev. ed. p. 65)

To throw oneself into the maelstrom of political struggles or to withdraw utterly from any interest in the affairs of men outside the Bahá'í community are two extremes that must be avoided by every loyal Bahá'í. The true course is more difficult to follow, and requires wisdom and mature judgment. The general guidelines are given with great clarity by the beloved Guardian in "The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh," and can be found on pages 64 to 67 of *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*....

The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Holy Shrines for your guidance and for the reinforcement of your devoted endeavors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

23 January 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

KINDLY CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS NEWS PROGRESS HISTORIC MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

FOLLOWING STRENUOUS DETAILED NEGOTIATIONS, TOWN PLANNING SCHEME ESSENTIAL FOR INITIATION OF PROJECTS WAS OFFICIALLY APPROVED BY LOCAL TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE AND CITY COUNCIL OF HAIFA ON 11 OCTOBER 1989, CONFIRMING GOODWILL TOWARDS PROJECTS EXPRESSED BY CITY COUNCIL AT TIME INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION. SCHEME IS NOW BEFORE DISTRICT TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION FOR FINAL APPROVAL. THIS PLAN INCLUDES CANCELLATION TWO ROADS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED TO CROSS BAHÁ'Í LANDS, AND LOWERING LEVEL MAIN THOROUGHFARE THUS PERMITTING CONSTRUCTION TERRACES LINKING GARDENS SURROUNDING SHRINE BÁB WITH THOSE ADJACENT ARCHIVES BUILDING. GRANTING OF APPROVALS INVOLVES OUR COMMITMENT IMMEDIATELY START WORK.

GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ANNOUNCED RIDVÁN MESSAGE, REQUIRED FOR DESIGN FOUNDATIONS BUILDINGS ARC, NOW COMPLETED.

BUILDING PERMIT DRAWINGS FOR ARCHIVES BUILDING EXTENSION AND CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS SUBMITTED, ENABLING CONSIDERATION APPLICATION BUILDING PERMIT RUN CONCURRENTLY LAST STAGE APPROVAL TOWN PLANNING SCHEME.

OF \$50,000,000 CALLED FOR AS ESSENTIAL RESERVE FOR INITIATION CONSTRUCTION, APPROXIMATELY \$26,000,000 SO FAR CONTRIBUTED. REMAINING SUM NOW URGENTLY NEEDED.

EXECUTION STUPENDOUS COLLECTIVE UNDERTAKING GATHERING MOMENTUM, PARALLELING EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS WORLD SCENE, ACCELERATION CONVERSION PEOPLES CAUSE GOD, WIDER DIFFUSION MESSAGE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH REMAINING AREAS GLOBE. SUPPLICATING BLESSINGS ALMIGHTY REINFORCE EVERY EFFORT HIS DEVOTED FOLLOWERS ACCOMPLISHMENT VITAL TASKS.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

8 February 1990

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

FAR-REACHING EVENTS BEING ENACTED WORLD STAGE, PARTICULARLY IN EASTERN EUROPE AND SOVIET UNION, ON THRESHOLD FINAL FATE-LADEN DECADE CENTURY OF LIGHT, PROVIDE FURTHER DRAMATIC EVIDENCE RESISTLESS OPERATION OF GOD'S MAJOR PLAN FOR TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY. RAPID UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENTS NECESSITATE CORRESPONDING PARALLEL ACCELERATION IN LIFE-GIVING ENTERPRISES BEING PURSUED BY INHERITORS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S RESPLENDENT REVELATION.

REJOICE THEREFORE ANNOUNCE LAUNCHING AT RIDVÁN OF SUBSIDIARY TWO YEAR TEACHING PLAN FOR VAST REMAINING REACHES EASTERN EUROPE AND ASIA. MOMENTOUS STEP INVOLVES FURTHER SYSTEMATIC UNFOLDMENT PROVISIONS TABLETS MASTER-PLAN OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ALREADY IN ADVANCED STAGE OF OPERATION OTHER AREAS PLANET. REGIONAL ENTERPRISE, CONCEIVED IN CONSULTATION INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER, DESIGNED SIGNIFICANTLY REINFORCE CURRENT SIX YEAR GLOBAL PLAN. OBJECTIVES INCLUDE ATTRACTION NUMEROUS NEW SUPPORTERS FAITH, GREAT INCREASE TRANSLATION, PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE IN REQUISITE LANGUAGES ENTIRE AREA, AND EXTENSION BENEFICENT INFLUENCE DIVINELY APPOINTED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER THROUGH ERECTION FRAMEWORK LOCAL NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS IN AS MANY EASTERN COUNTRIES AS POSSIBLE UP TO AND INCLUDING RIDVÁN 1992.

CALLING UPON THOSE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EUROPE, ASIA AND AMERICA WHICH BEAR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL NATIONS INVOLVED, TO CONSULT WITH COUNSELORS AND FORMULATE DETAILS SPECIFIC GOALS INCORPORATING AND SUPPLEMENTING THOSE ALREADY ADOPTED AND IN PROCESS ACCOMPLISHMENT UNDER SIX YEAR PLAN. MOVED PAY TRIBUTE PRESENT HOUR REMARKABLE UNSUNG ACHIEVEMENTS THOSE INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS PRESENTLY LABORING ADVANCEMENT CAUSE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND SOVIET UNION, ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH HAVE BLAZED TRAILS FOR COMING LARGE-SCALE INITIATIVE. CALL UPON BAHÁ'Í WORLD ARISE SUPPORT DIFFUSION WORLD-REDEEMING MESSAGE FAITH GOAL AREAS THROUGH SETTLEMENT PIONEERS AND THROUGH DESPATCH STEADY FLOW TRAVELING TEACHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGES COUNTRIES AND REPUBLICS EASTERN BLOC....

BROAD VISTAS NOW OPEN TO FAITH GOD PROVIDE UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITIES WIN FRESH VICTORIES AS WORTHY OFFERING SACRED THRESHOLD BLESSED BEAUTY OCCASION COMMEMORATION FIRST CENTENARY HIS ASCENSION COMING HOLY YEAR. IMPLORING ABUNDANT OUTPOURING DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS PARTICIPANTS ALL FACETS HISTORIC SIX YEAR CAMPAIGN.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



## **The Universal House of Justice**

12 February 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World

With feelings of thankfulness and joy we announce an achievement of immense importance to the accelerating progress of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. The University of Maryland and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States recently signed a memorandum of understanding, establishing "The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace" at that University's Center for International Development and Conflict Management. The stated purpose of the Chair is "to conduct and publish research, design courses and conduct seminars in the field of Bahá'í studies and world peace within an interdisciplinary context; to initiate public forums for discussing the issues proposed in the Statement of the Universal House of Justice entitled *The Promise of World Peace*; and to establish academic linkages with and provide technical assistance to Bahá'í institutions in the fields of peace education and international development."

This first initiative by a well-founded, significant institution of higher learning to formulate such a serious program of Bahá'í studies is a direct response to the Peace Statement, as is borne out by a letter addressed to us by the Director of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management in which he said: "With this letter I am answering on behalf of CIDCM and the University of Maryland your call: 'If the Bahá'í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.'"

Fully cognizant of Bahá'u'lláh's praise of knowledge as "wings to man's life" and of the importance which He assigns to its acquisition; of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice that we should "seek to impart the Message to influential persons and become a cause of guidance to the learned and distinguished"; and of Shoghi Effendi's call for a "resolute attempt" to reinforce measures "for the establishment of closer contact with the leaders of public thought, with colleges and universities," we hail this seminal development both as a mark of the Faith's emergence from obscurity and as the harbinger of that day when hosts of scholars will devote their energies to the exploration, exposition and defense of the dynamic principles animating the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, thereby fulfilling the need identified by the beloved Guardian for "well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society." On that day, we shall witness an expansion and consolidation of the community as has not yet been experienced.

May the Blessed Beauty enable the new Bahá'í Chair for World Peace to achieve its laudable purpose; may He shower upon all who support it His abundant confirmations.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

20 April 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Twenty-five years ago, when the International Deputization Fund was established in the Holy Land by the Universal House of Justice and the friends were invited to contribute to it in support of pioneering and traveling teaching projects throughout the world, these illuminating words of Bahá'u'lláh were quoted:

Center 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...

It is clear from this injunction of Bahá'u'lláh's that the primary responsibility to promote the propagation of the Faith of God rests on the individual believer. It is, likewise, his responsibility, if he is unable to discharge this duty, to appoint one who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation.

Many of the friends have, ever since these words were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, succeeded in responding to the call. A great number have not found it easy to select suitable and qualified deputies willing to undertake such a task for them.

We feel that the time has come, as the Bahá'í world is rapidly moving towards the end of the Six Year Plan, for National Spiritual Assemblies to take an active part in facilitating the selection and appointment of suitable pioneers and traveling teachers, by providing a link between those wishing to deputize, and those qualified and ready to be deputized. The manner in which this objective can be achieved is left to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly, which should consider the conditions of its national community, and determine, preferably in consultation with the Counselors or their representatives, the wisest and most effective course of action to follow. It is hoped that whatever procedures are adopted, they will assist the friends to fulfill their responsibilities, to the extent possible, in the manner prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh.

The way is, of course, always open for the friends to use the International Deputization Fund as the vehicle of their compliance with Bahá'u'lláh's injunction. Thus, those who are unable, or find it difficult, to identify suitable candidates to be designated as their deputies are able to send their contributions to the International Deputization Fund on a regular basis in order to fulfill their sacred obligation for the promotion of the teaching work.

Responsibility for the administration of this Fund has been assigned to the International Teaching Centre and, in its turn, the Teaching Center makes specific allocations through the Continental Pioneer

Committees, whose memberships have recently been renewed and made known to the friends. A few months ago short-term pioneer projects were announced and the concept of short-term pioneers has been received with great excitement by the friends everywhere. Whenever supplementary funds are needed to assist in the prosecution of these projects, or to finance long-term pioneering and traveling teaching projects, application could be made to the International Deputization Fund. National Spiritual Assemblies, therefore, could work out cost estimates of projects needing financial support, and submit their requests for budget assistance to the Continental Pioneer Committees.

The occasion demands that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh should wholeheartedly, with fresh enthusiasm and renewed dedication, step into this arena of service. It is our hope and prayer that through such universal participation in this mighty endeavor, those whose circumstances do not enable them at this time to fulfill the Beloved's call, as clearly enunciated in His celebrated passage quoted above, will discharge their obligation by contributing to the International Deputization Fund, thus providing the means whereby others may propel the remaining stages of the Six Year Plan to a triumphant conclusion.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## 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 enrollments 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 recreation 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 reestablishment 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 fulfillment of a wish expressed to him by our beloved Guardian some sixty years ago.

Nor have the Counselor 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 Counselors 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 Counselors 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, reinstituted 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 Center 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 Honor 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 Center 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 Coworkers: 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 Center 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 enrollments 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 fulfillment 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 marvelous diversity in the large numbers of ethnic groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to fortify it through larger enrollments 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 endeavor. 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 Counselors 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

24 May 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH FEELINGS OF PROFOUND JOY ANNOUNCE TO FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN EVERY LAND THAT ON MORNING OF TWENTY-THIRD MAY, ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE DECLARATION OF THE BÁB, WORK ON EXTENSION TERRACES COMMENCED. THIS HISTORIC OCCASION MARKED BY VISIT HIS SHRINE AND SHRINE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ BY THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE OF GOD AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚHÍYYIH KHÁNUM AND 'ALÍ-AKBAR FURÚTAN, THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND COUNSELOR MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER WITH FARIBORZ SAHBA, ARCHITECT OF TERRACES AND MANAGER OF ARC PROJECT, TO PRAY FOR DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS ENABLE UNINTERRUPTED PROSECUTION THIS MAJESTIC ENTERPRISE. SUBSEQUENTLY DETAILED PLANS WERE VIEWED FOR LENGTHENING EASTERN WING OF MAIN TERRACE OF SHRINE, MAKING IT EQUAL TO EXISTING WESTERN WING.

GLORIOUS UNDERTAKING CREATION BEFITTING RESTING PLACE MARTYR-HERALD FAITH WAS ENVISAGED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH HIMSELF, WAS SOLEMNLY INITIATED BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, WHO RAISED WITH INFINITE PAINS ORIGINAL STRUCTURE AND PLACED WITHIN IT THE SACRED REMAINS OF THE BÁB, WAS VIGOROUSLY PURSUED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, WHO COMPLETED CENTRAL EDIFICE, EMBELLISHED IT WITH BEAUTEOUS SUPERSTRUCTURE AND CONNECTED IT WITH MAIN AVENUE TEMPLAR COLONY THROUGH CONSTRUCTION FIRST NINE TERRACES, IS NOW ENTERING UPON CULMINATING PHASE ITS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXTENSION BEAUTIFICATION NINE EXISTING TERRACES AND CONSTRUCTION NINE MORE TO REALIZE MONUMENTAL CONCEPT REACHING FROM FOOT TO CREST HOLY MOUNTAIN.

CALL UPON FRIENDS EVERY LAND RALLY SUPPORT THIS SACRED ENTERPRISE NOW INSEPARABLY LINKED WITH ARC PROJECT EXPRESS BEFITTINGLY THEIR AWARENESS MAGNITUDE BOUNTY CONFERRED UPON MANKIND BY MINISTRY AND SACRIFICE BLESSED BÁB, DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S CALL IN TABLET OF CARMEL TO ESTABLISH UPON THAT MOUNTAIN SEAT GOD'S THRONE AND FULFILL, THROUGH THEIR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS, 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S AND SHOGHI EFFENDI'S VISION OF EFFLORESCENCE MIGHTY INSTITUTIONS FAITH ON MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

21 November 1990

To the Friends gathered at the Moscow Conference

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is with a sense of joy and wonderment that we address you, the representatives of the Bahá'í communities throughout the USSR and of the National Spiritual Assemblies which have been given the awesome responsibility for raising up the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in that vast area. The march of world events has utterly transformed the scene of your labors, presenting you with formidable problems but with achievements and opportunities which must cause your hearts to sing with joy to the Almighty.

In the Heroic Age of the Faith many events occurred to link it with the peoples of Russia. We need but mention the offer of asylum extended to Bahá'u'lláh by the Russian Government prior to His banishment to Iraq; His Tablet addressed to Tsar Alexander II; the deep interest that the Cause aroused in Russian scholars and leading literary figures; the glories of the Bahá'í community which arose in 'Ishqábád; the exemplary action of the members of that community in appealing for clemency for its persecutors; and the raising of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in that city. A beginning which showed such promise was eclipsed by the restrictions following the First World War but, even in those dark days, the beloved Guardian saw clearly that it was but a temporary veiling of the light of this Revelation. In a letter he wrote in Persian to the believers in 'Ishqábád on 11 January 1923 we find these insightful words:

There is no doubt that the day will come when the very people who are now engaged in destroying the foundations of faith in God and promoting this baseless doctrine of materialism will arise and, by their own hand, snuff out the flame of this commotion. They will sweep away the entire structure of their unrestrained godlessness and will arise with heart and soul, and with hitherto unmatched vigor, to atone for their past failures. They will join the ranks of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and arise to promote His Cause.... If the friends remain steadfast, and discharge their duties with loyalty and prudence, the veils of God's inscrutable wisdom will be lifted and extraordinary events will be witnessed. The hosts of divine confirmation, fortified by the power of the Spirit will, in unimaginable ways and from unexpected quarters, provide the means for the triumph of the Cause of our Self-Subsisting Lord, and in so doing will brighten the eyes of the faithful throughout the world.

And again, on 2 January 1930:

Russia will in the future become a delectable paradise, and the teaching work in that land will be carried out on an unprecedented scale. The House of Worship established in its very heart will shine forth with dazzling splendor, and the call of the Most Great Name will reverberate in its temples, its churches, and its places of worship. We need to show forth patience and forbearance. In these momentous convulsions there lie concealed mighty and consummate mysteries, which will be revealed to men's eyes in the days to come.

We have been blessed to see the beginning of the unfoldment of these mysteries, and to this generation has been entrusted the task of conveying the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the many races and peoples of that land, and of raising up Bahá'í communities in its cities, towns and villages.

The society in the midst of which you are called upon to work is undergoing radical changes in every aspect of its life, changes which are but a concentration of the problems with which every country, and world society as a whole, is grappling. The underlying cause of this transformation is that this is the age of the Oneness of Mankind, and therefore every people, whether of the USSR or in other parts of the world, must find its way to the unity in diversity, the harmony of formerly conflicting elements, which Shoghi Effendi held forth as the goal towards which mankind is striving. On this theme he wrote on 11 March 1936 to the emerging Bahá'í communities of the West, directing their attention to the challenging statements made by the Founder of their Faith:

"A new life," Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, "is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause, or perceived its motive." "O ye children of men," He thus addresses His generation, "the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race ... This is the straight path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure." "The well-being of mankind," He declares, "its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." "So powerful is the light of unity," is His further testimony, "that it can illuminate the whole earth. The one true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words ... This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations." "He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful," He, moreover, has written, "cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. Haste ye to win your share of God's good grace and mercy in this Day that eclipseth all other created days."

Commenting on the implications of these momentous words, Shoghi Effendi states:

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded....

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

No one who contemplates the present conditions of the world, let alone of the USSR, could expect that such a consummation will come without great effort, without traversing manifold difficulties. But the mainspring of its achievement is the awakening of ever more human beings to the truth of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, and their adherence to His Cause and His Covenant, the illumination of their spiritual and moral lives by the light of His Teachings, and the unification of their efforts through His Administrative Order. Through their individual transformation and through their combined efforts they will transform the conditions of the world and bring to birth a new, worldwide civilization.

The culmination of this process lies in centuries ahead, but it is not in the end alone that joy is found. The true nature of the human soul is spiritual; it is the relationship of each soul to God and its kinship with every other soul that brings true happiness and fulfillment. Our Bahá'í communities are still far from the perfection that Bahá'u'lláh desires for us, but it is in our loving support of one another, in our forbearance of each other's failings, in our determination to develop and uphold the institutions which Bahá'u'lláh has ordained, in our spirit of love and of tolerance towards all people, and in our courage and perseverance through all difficulties, that we achieve the fulfillment of our lives.

Now, at this Conference, you are to consider the conditions of the Cause in your lands, to examine the possibilities before you and to recommend the courses of action that you deem to be most advantageous in the months immediately ahead. There are tasks to which you must now set your hands to prepare for the achievements of tomorrow. Do not permit the problems in your way to dismay you or deflect you from your goals; it is to overcome the problems of humankind that the Bahá'í community has been brought into being. Your vital task is to immerse yourselves in the study of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, to enrich your spiritual lives and to discover thereby the best direction for your endeavors, to express them in your actions, and to convey them to those who thirst for guidance. You are the instruments of the purpose of God, the channels of His grace, the bearers of His Message, the holders of the key to the challenges of the age. Follow His guidance and the successes you will achieve will be an inspiration to your fellow-believers and the quickener of hope in the hearts of the people.

Be assured that as you arise for the promotion of His Cause, the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh will surround you, and you will witness the truth of these exalted words uttered by Him in His Most Great Prison:

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of Glory, and shall 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.

We shall pray ardently on your behalf in the Holy Shrines and eagerly await news of the outcome of your deliberations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

2 January 1991

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has studied your letter ... which contains proposals for a number of changes to Bahá'í electoral, judicial and reviewing procedures....

The questions you have raised are worthy of the most serious consideration. Although they are specifically concerned with certain administrative procedures, they touch upon fundamental principles of far-reaching implications. To a significant extent the answers to them relate to the basic attitude we as Bahá'ís have both toward the nature of man at the advent of the coming of age of the entire human race, and toward the developmental processes of a world community in the initial stages of its formative age during the most critical time of transition from the old dispensation to the new.

The sense of our newness as an evolving community is underscored by the fact that at this very moment we are engaged for the first time in preparing for the publication of the full text of our Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, with annotations. This anticipated event indicates how much more we have to understand our fundamental laws before our institutions can proceed to lay down rules and regulations beyond those which are already in effect. The House of Justice feels that enough has been stated by the Guardian to enable the friends to cope for the time being with the problems you have cited. However, we are to convey the following comments on the various points of your letter.

For all its size—some five million members worldwide, the majority of whom have joined the Faith in the past 15 years—the Bahá'í community is still far from attaining the administrative maturity that would allow for the imposition, even if it were permissible, of certain rules. However acute your observations, they are based on a history limited in time and in experience. It bears noting that even though the systematic efforts of establishing the Bahá'í administration began some seven decades ago, a large majority of the current National Spiritual Assemblies (95 out of 151) came into existence only during the last 26 years and have emerged in communities the vast majority of whose members are not yet deeply grounded in the administrative principles of the Faith. Ordinarily, a substantial proportion of the voting members of the communities do not regularly participate in Bahá'í elections. Moreover, because of the relatively small number of nationally active believers, the range of choice in many communities may seem to the conscientious voter to be limited in terms of the stated qualifications for membership on the National Spiritual Assembly. Given these facts, it is remarkable that at this stage in the development of the world community, National Spiritual Assemblies are successfully elected annually in accordance with basic Bahá'í principles.

You hold that for the National Spiritual Assembly of a country like Germany or the United States to be composed of almost the same members over many years is neither comprehensible nor advantageous. Change is indeed healthy for a living organism, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, but he also said that change for change's sake is unwise. Without defending any particular position, we feel it important to recognize that a period of no change in Assembly membership could be a stabilizing necessity for a community. A believer who had concerns similar to your own in his wish to see more rapid change in the membership of his National Spiritual Assembly suggested to Shoghi Effendi two alternative solutions: (1) that only delegates would be eligible for membership on the National Spiritual Assembly; and (2) that no believer should serve more than nine consecutive years on a Spiritual Assembly, suggesting that after the lapse of one year the believer could be reelected for another period of nine years. The Guardian's reply was conveyed in a letter written by his secretary on 6 July 1944:

Regarding your questions concerning the advisability of changing the basis of the National Assembly's election and confining it to the body of delegates or of limiting the term of office: He feels that as any such changes are of a radical nature and should therefore also apply to the National Spiritual Assemblies of other countries they are inadvisable and premature, both for this reason and because of their very nature.

What is needed is to get the Administration in its present form to run more efficiently and at the same time to build up a higher sense of responsibility among the body of the believers. They should be encouraged to think more, not only about the qualifications of members of their elected bodies, but also about such things as you mention, the law of averages, the age and indisposition of some of the members, etc.

With respect to the United States, your observation does not quite hold up if you consider the numerous changes in membership which have occurred in that country's National Assembly over the last 30 years, and even in the last eight years when two-thirds of the membership has changed and there have been several changes of officers. Nor has the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany remained static: according to records at the Bahá'í World Centre, during the last 12 years, there have been 12 individual changes in that Assembly's membership; today only one from the members of the 1978-79 Assembly remains on the body.

You contend that an elected body which has been formed in the same manner over many years conceals the danger of rigidity, immobility, insistence on tradition, etc. Such condition cannot indefinitely remain concealed if the body of the community with its many local entities and varied activities, including the Nineteen Day Feast, is functioning conscientiously. There is a direct relationship between the quality of the functioning of the local communities and the condition of the National Spiritual Assembly, but the dynamics of this relationship have yet to be fully recognized in all national communities. In this regard the work of the Continental Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards is of particular relevance, since assisting Spiritual Assemblies to function properly is one of their duties.

There is a tendency on the part of the friends, because of its broad authority and overarching responsibilities, to concentrate unduly on the influence, real or imagined, of the National Spiritual Assembly; however, little is appreciated of the latent vast and salutary effect which well-functioning local

communities can exert on the development of the national community and thus on the very shaping of the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Some of the problems now evident in the composition and performance of National Spiritual Assemblies have their roots in weakness and malfunctioning at the local level, where the true character of the Faith has the widest latitude to express itself both in the corporate manner in which practical matters are dealt with and in the quality of the involvement and initiative of the individuals composing these communities. The ideal functioning of a National Spiritual Assembly and of the electoral system that sustains it obviously cannot be forced and must trust to development over time as experience is gained.

The Bahá'í system of elections provides the voter with a degree of freedom unequalled by any other system; as a corollary, it restricts the freedom of those called upon to serve. The voter is called upon to consider prayerfully the range of believers for whom he can vote, and then to vote only for those who best combine the necessary qualities, irrespective of any extraneous or material factors. Such an attitude, if dispassionately exercised by every voter at each election, should ensure that those elected are among those best suited, making allowance for lack of perfection in the voters.

Your observation that the current system of Bahá'í elections can lead to a perpetuation of the same membership on a Spiritual Assembly is quite accurate, but the system is not bound by any requirement to reelect the same membership; it is as free to do so as it is capable of effecting gradual or radical change, depending solely on the voters' perception of prevailing circumstances and conditions and of the needs of the Cause. Time and education of the friends will bring about corrections of any faults in the current operation of the electoral system.

The sacred nature of Bahá'í elections, especially as it is expressed in the freedom of conscience of the voters, is, of course, a major consideration in any attempt to introduce rules such as you have recommended. A letter dated 4 February 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer stresses the importance of such freedom and indicated that it

constitutes the distinguishing feature and the marked superiority of the Bahá'í electoral methods over those commonly associated with political parties and factions....

(The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria, p. 67)

Further, in a letter dated 14 May 1927 Shoghi Effendi described ways in which the voters should carry out their sacred responsibilities in electing members of Spiritual Assemblies:

I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinions of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our



Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.

[*Principles of Bahá'í Administration: A Compilation*, 1st Indian ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 47]

It is clear then that to adopt a rule limiting the eligibility of an Assembly member for reelection would limit the freedom of choice of the electors and would add an element completely discordant to the entire pattern of Bahá'í elections.

The question of limiting the terms of office must be considered in the same light, but a National Spiritual Assembly need not accept an untenable situation with regard to any of its officers. While the National Spiritual Assembly has no control over the composition of its membership, it does have control over the performance of its own officers and is free to discuss its concerns if an officer is declining in his functions. If it becomes imperative not to reelect an officer, the members should not be inhibited by secondary considerations. If the disadvantage to the institution of reelecting an officer outweighs all other considerations, the members should not fail in their duty to act in the best interest of the Cause as conscience dictates. This requires moral courage. One of the virtues of secret balloting and non-electioneering in Bahá'í elections at any level is the freedom afforded the voter to act privately and conscientiously, and it removes any need for the voter to reveal or justify his choice to anyone. Questions affecting the personal circumstances of the officer, such as his employability outside the Bahá'í community, financial needs, etc. should be dealt with separately and with candor and considerateness. In a case of extreme difficulty the guidance of the House of Justice may be sought.

You raise concerns about the problems that can arise from the service of a husband and wife on the same Assembly. We should point out that the same problems can arise from the joint service of a parent and child, of two brothers, of two partners in business, or of any two other people who have close association outside their membership on the Assembly. A rule to deal with all these possibilities would itself introduce serious problems. The solution to this is a question of maturation. Bahá'ís have to learn to stand on their own two feet and speak their minds and judge according to their own understanding, as strongly exhorted by Bahá'u'lláh in the Hidden Words, in which He declares that "The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice."

You call attention to the conflict of interest and other problems which can arise if a member of an Assembly is called upon to consult on a matter which concerns him personally and intimately; for example, to be a judge in his own case or in that of his spouse. Such a situation can, indeed, produce serious and embarrassing complications. The House of Justice has held that it is not proper for a member of a Spiritual Assembly to be debarred from exercising his right to membership in the consideration of such matters. (In some instances, the individual concerned has exercised on his own initiative the option of absenting himself from the proceedings to allow his fellow members greater freedom to judge the case.) However, in certain circumstances, an Assembly may find it wise and helpful to avoid the problems latent in such a situation by adopting different approaches: it could appoint a special committee to deal with the matter on

its behalf; or it could refer the case to the National Spiritual Assembly for it to deal with, either directly or through a committee.

You offer the suggestion that a “Bill of Rights” be formulated to define basic human rights and to set out the legal position of the believers in relation to the institutions as a means of eliminating arbitrary behavior and the possible miscarriage of justice. The House of Justice asks us to say that undoubtedly such procedures as will be required in the future to protect the rights of individuals in their relationship to the institutions will evolve. At the present time, however, the imposition of them would complicate the functioning of Spiritual Assemblies without providing a commensurate degree of advantage. The basic safeguard, which has been in force, is the right of every believer to appeal a decision, first to the Local Assembly which rendered it, then to his National Spiritual Assembly, and finally to the Universal House of Justice. As you are well aware, Bahá’í institutions are bound by the teachings of the Faith to uphold freedom of expression and to safeguard the personal rights and initiative of the individual. The responsibilities and duties of the institutions towards the believers are also incorporated, in broad terms, in such documents as the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice and the Declarations of Trust and the By-Laws of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. In addition, the letter of 29 December 1988 to the American Bahá’í community from the House of Justice draws attention to the “equilibrium of responsibilities” that underpins the relationship between the Assemblies and the believers, and it reaffirms a nonadversarial framework to guide their interactions.

Regarding the issue of the competent review of the writings of Bahá’í authors, the House of Justice is of the opinion that the difficulties which arise in the review process come, not from a need for clarification of the guidelines, but from a need for good judgment and common sense in their application. It endeavors from time to time to improve the functioning of National Spiritual Assemblies and their reviewing committees in this area.

In relation to your suggested minimum requirement that reviewers possess the requisite factual competence to perform the reviewing task, we are to say that the House of Justice does not feel that it is necessary for the reviewer to be qualified in the same discipline as the writer of the document. For example, in the case of an article by a professional historian, it is not the function of the reviewer to ascertain the correctness of the article from a historian’s point of view; it is his task to ensure that the writer has not, in the course of his discussion, misrepresented the Bahá’í teachings or put forward theses which are incompatible with being a Bahá’í. It is evident, then, that reviewers should combine a profound knowledge of the Faith and understanding of its principles with the wisdom and good judgment to understand their limitations in the author’s specific area of expertise. Furthermore, authors of scholarly works that are based on materials that may not be known or available to those who must do the reviewing are at liberty to bring this situation to the attention of the responsible National Assembly. Should a difference of opinion arise between the author and the reviewing committee, and the National Spiritual Assembly is unable to find a resolution, the matter may be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

Finally, we are to say that the House of Justice entirely agrees with your perception that elements of the “old” order should not be discarded simply because they are old. The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh provides the

essential Laws and Principles on which all must be built, but in this building, and in the carrying out of our work, we Bahá'ís should take the utmost advantage of every skill and element of experience available to us, no matter from where it comes. We must, however, be careful in our approach. As the methods of the old order fit the stage of the evolution of society in which they were conceived, it is not always possible to judge clearly which of them may safely be applied to the operation of the Bahá'í community. What we have to bear in mind is that the old systems represent immature stages in the political evolution of mankind and that their best features have, according to Shoghi Effendi, been incorporated into the Bahá'í Administrative Order. We should therefore not be too anxious to adopt old methods in our efforts to correct perceived irregularities, which may only be incidental to the transition taking place rather than intrinsic to the system ordained by Bahá'u'lláh.

The House of Justice trusts that these comments will aid your thinking about these important issues and assures you of its prayers on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

3 April 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to the Ridván 1991 message which has already been mailed to you, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey the following advice and information with regard to the forthcoming Holy Year.

You are already aware of the two major events of the Year: the commemorative gathering in the Holy Land during May 1992 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, and the World Congress in New York during November 1992 to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of His Covenant. As the time draws closer, you will be receiving more and more communications from the various agencies acting on behalf of the House of Justice in making preparations for these events. To prevent confusion and to enable you to respond effectively to these communications, the House of Justice suggests that, if you have not already done so, you appoint an active, efficient and reliable individual or small committee to study these communications on your behalf, keep you thoroughly informed of their contents and requirements, and assist you to coordinate your responses and to take timely and necessary actions in relation to your community.

As was pointed out in the Ridván 1990 message, the two major events being planned should not be the only commemorative activities of the Holy Year; indeed, the entire Bahá'í world at its local and national levels will engage in activities appropriate to the purposes of the Holy Year. It is important that throughout this period the attitude of the friends in all localities reflects the significance of the two occasions to be commemorated.

For the observance of the first occasion, the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing, you will want to make sure that a proper devotional program takes place in each locality, at the appropriate time on 29 May, and that the best effort is made to uphold the preeminent importance, the dignity and the profoundly spiritual character of the occasion, to which non-Bahá'ís may be invited according to the discretion of the Spiritual Assemblies. To support your preparations and to unite the hearts and experience of the believers worldwide, the House of Justice will soon be sending to you the sacred readings which have been selected for the gathering at the Most Holy Shrine on that occasion. Beyond these devotional programs, the friends may plan to hold other special events—national, regional or local—for the benefit of both themselves and non-Bahá'ís, to give a more public character to the observance of this anniversary and at which informative and inspirational presentations on the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh can be made and discussions held.

For the second commemoration, communities everywhere, at local, regional and national levels, should plan to hold events in relation to the World Congress. Some of these may be held at the same time as the World Congress, some at other times. Whatever the decision of the Spiritual Assemblies, the events should have the same objective as the World Congress, which is to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and to proclaim its aims and unifying power. The prospect of such events should encourage the friends to study the history and meaning of the Covenant; in such study, the Continental Counselors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants will, no doubt, be sources of encouragement, stimulation and assistance.

Celebration in this connection does not mean merely festive activities. It is primarily a spiritual celebration that is called for: occasions for deep reflection on the historic importance, the uniqueness, the meaning and the efficacy of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh, on the outstanding results of its influence in raising up a worldwide community comprising a great diversity of members, and on the triumph of its virtue as a unifying power. At the heart of such reflection will be contemplation of the peerless purpose, magnetic person, luminous character and exemplary acts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His station as the Center and living embodiment of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. Consciousness of the exceptional and glorious stage in humanity's spiritual evolution initiated by the Covenant, the awe such consciousness inspires and the thankful gladness it induces are of the essence of the celebration intended by the World Congress and all other events associated with this centenary. A major purpose of these events will therefore be to evoke this solemn consciousness, which is itself the wellspring of the most exquisite celebratory joy. In this spirit the commemorative activities around the world should acclaim and proclaim the Covenant as the pivotal center of unity for all humankind and illustrate its dynamic effect on the struggle, the spread, and the redemptive achievements of the Bahá'í community since the passing of the Blessed Beauty.

You will undoubtedly appreciate that publicity through the mass media should be incorporated into your plans for the Holy Year. All suitable and available creative resources—writers, artists, composers, musicians, poets, public information experts—should be called to the aid of the community, so as to imbue its plans with the most effective and attractive variety of expression. The World Center will be interested in learning of these plans as they are developed, so that news of them might be shared with others.

An important feature of the activities of the Holy Year will be the widest possible proclamation of the Name of Bahá'u'lláh; care must, of course, be exercised in all situations to uphold the dignity of this Name. As an assistance to your efforts, a statement on Bahá'u'lláh has been prepared, at the request of the House of Justice, by the Office of Public Information at the Bahá'í World Centre. We are happy to enclose a copy.

Bearing the title *Bahá'u'lláh*, the statement is intended primarily for wide distribution to the public; however, as you will readily see, it has great value as a source of study and inspiration for the friends themselves. You are free to translate and print it in dignified but moderately priced editions so that its cost to the friends will be affordable. Perhaps you will want to collaborate with other National Assemblies or with the publishing trust of any one of them in acquiring a supply of the printed material for your community. You may also wish to produce a special edition for presentation to dignitaries and prominent figures in your country; the Office of Public Information is planning to print a special edition in English for

limited use and you may find such an edition appropriate to your needs. Furthermore, you will want to draw upon the statement in providing substance for various presentations on the Faith to be made during the course of the Holy Year. It is left entirely to your discretion to determine in what ways you can most effectively exploit its contents. Whatever your plans, the House of Justice expects that the statement will be published widely and abundantly for liberal distribution and use by the friends everywhere. National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies, with the encouragement and support of the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, will certainly see to the successful pursuit of these important objectives.

We have been asked to assure you of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice at the Holy Shrines that your endeavors to raise ever higher the standard of Bahá'u'lláh during the special year ahead may evoke His good pleasure and constant confirmations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## 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 worldwide community and to the World Center 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 behavior 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 reestablishment 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 Riḍván. 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 Rúḥíyyih Khánum in Romania, Mr. 'Alí Akbar Furútan in the Soviet Union, and Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá in Czechoslovakia. Counselor 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 marvelous signs and portents, we cannot resist the impulse to express our profound love and appreciation to the Continental Counselors, 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 Counselors 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 wholehearted 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 worldwide 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 Center 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 Honor 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 Center 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 endeavor 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 endeavors 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 favorable 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 guidelines for the behavior 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

1 May 1991

[To two individuals]

Dear Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letters ... and has instructed us to send you the following reply....

First of all, we are asked to explain that although Bahá'ís believe that the Teachings and Order of Bahá'u'lláh are the solution to the current problems of mankind, they abstain completely from ever attempting to put them into effect through political action. Only if people voluntarily accept them and submit themselves freely to this Order will it be implemented in the world. Bahá'ís should never attempt to impose their belief on anyone. Bahá'u'lláh has given certain teachings which Bahá'ís believe to be true; they offer these teachings to the rest of mankind. Whosoever accepts them is a Bahá'í, but everyone is free to reject them. No one is ever compelled to become a Bahá'í, nor is anyone compelled to remain a Bahá'í. If one has accepted the Bahá'í Faith and later concludes that one has made a mistake, one is free to withdraw, and no stigma is attached to such an action. In all such things Bahá'ís uphold Bahá'u'lláh's principle of independent investigation of truth.

But one must ask what is the truth? Naturally human beings are continually discovering more and more about the truth. God is infinite, so His truth also is infinite. Nevertheless, as human knowledge progresses there are certain truths that are clearly established. Acceptance of such truths is not a surrender of freedom but is a free acceptance of things as they are. For example it is now clearly established by science that the earth moves round the sun, and not vice versa. Any human being is free to believe the contrary but to do so is not an assertion of freedom, it is an evidence of ignorance or foolishness. In the same way, to accept that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be a Manifestation of God is true is not a surrender of freedom but the acceptance of a conclusion that one has confirmed to one's own satisfaction.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches, and Bahá'ís believe, that the fundamental truths of religion are not discovered by human beings but are revealed to mankind by God through His Manifestations. Whether or not this belief is true is, clearly, a matter of profound importance. If one does not accept it, one is free to adopt all manner of viewpoints including the one propounded by you in your letter, namely, that the followers of all the different religions should live together in harmony without becoming one religion, and that one can choose certain of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and reject others. This is a valid position, but the point that you should realize is that it is not the Bahá'í position. Bahá'ís respect your right to hold it, but you cannot hold it and be

a Bahá'í because a Bahá'í, by definition, accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and upholds His Covenant as, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity."

Bahá'ís believe that in this age God has revealed through Bahá'u'lláh the Teachings which will lead the followers of all religions to recognize their common foundation so that they will flow into this latest Dispensation of God's Revelation like rivers into one ocean and, in the words of Jesus, "there shall be one fold and one shepherd." They also believe that the Law of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for this stage of human history, and the institutions that He has founded, are the bedrock on which the unity and harmony of mankind will be built. This is what they teach, because this is what they believe to be the truth. Nevertheless, this does not prevent their living together in harmony with those who believe otherwise, or stop their collaborating in humanitarian activities with their fellow human beings of all other religions and of none.

It is apparent from your letters that you have not properly studied or understood the Bahá'í teachings and may well have been antagonized by shortcomings among members of the Bahá'í community. Of course, Bahá'ís try not to have shortcomings. They are striving with varying success to put the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh into effect in their lives and to raise up the institutions which He has ordained. Individuals and even Spiritual Assemblies are imperfect—this is an inevitable aspect of growth—but they have the satisfaction of witnessing improvement and maturation as the years go by.

The House of Justice hopes that you will make a deeper study of the Bahá'í teachings in collaboration with your Bahá'í friends and, even if you finally decide that you cannot accept them, that you will be able to collaborate with Bahá'ís and all others in the building of a better world.

With all good wishes,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

20 June 1991

To the Bahá'ís of the World

FOLLOWING RECEIPT BUILDING PERMITS FOR SECOND PHASE OF TERRACES OF THE BÁB'S SHRINE AND FOR EXCAVATION FOR THE FIRST TWO BUILDINGS, AND AFTER COMPLETION TENDER FORMALITIES, WE REJOICE ANNOUNCE CONTRACT SIGNED SEVENTEENTH JUNE 1991, OFFICIALLY COMMENCING PHASE TWO OF MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

THIS PHASE, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO TAKE APPROXIMATELY SIXTEEN MONTHS, WILL INCLUDE EXCAVATION AND ANCHOR WORK FOR CENTER STUDY TEXTS AND ARCHIVES EXTENSION AS WELL AS

EARTHWORK OF FIVE TERRACES IMMEDIATELY BELOW HOLY SHRINE AND EXTENSION OF MAIN TERRACE. TOTAL COST THIS PHASE ESTIMATED FIVE MILLION DOLLARS.

APPEAL CONTINUING FLOW FUNDS ENSURE UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS.

SUPPLICATING SACRED THRESHOLD DIVINE CONFIRMATION HISTORIC UNDERTAKING.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

28 October 1991

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

... The House of Justice was deeply touched by the spirit of your letter, warmly congratulates you on the status you have attained as an academic, and appreciates your efforts to make use of your scholarly training in lending expression to the Faith in academic circles.

The requirement that materials about the Faith authored by Bahá'ís must be reviewed by Bahá'í institutions before publication is imbedded in a Bahá'í administrative policy which originated with the explicit instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi included this instruction in his outline of the duties of National Spiritual Assemblies, and the duty of reviewing Bahá'í material is included in the constitution of these institutions with his approval. The requirement is temporary and is meant to protect the interests of the Faith at the early stages of its development.

You are, of course, entirely correct that only the Guardian had the prerogative of interpretation; it is not a prerogative that he could have devolved on other institutions. Yet in a number of letters written on his behalf, the importance of reviewing manuscripts about the Faith was repeatedly emphasized, such as in a letter dated 15 November 1956 written to an individual, in which the following is stated:

Any Bahá'í book presenting the Faith should be reviewed by a competent body. This only means that they should ascertain whether there is any misrepresentation of the Teachings in it. Sometimes the friends think they have to go into literary reviews and interfere with the author's style etc., which of course is wholly unnecessary....

Clearly, then, there is a distinction between the function of interpretation for which Shoghi Effendi was solely responsible and the function of Bahá'í review, which is essentially a matter of judgment. Literary review is, of course, a separate matter.

The House of Justice feels certain that it is possible for scholars to abide by this requirement without undermining the academic standard of their work, since the purpose of review is not inimical to academic excellence. Your concerns as an academic certainly deserve careful attention. But the Bahá'í community also has immense concerns about the consequences of dispensing too quickly with this requirement. The Bahá'í Faith makes very serious claims and has a rich and complex history, but it is as yet a young religion whose precepts are not widely understood. It has been undergoing severe persecution in the land of its birth and is experiencing serious opposition in other places where its detractors have no compunction in

misrepresenting its purposes. Until its history, teachings and practices are well known throughout the world, it will be necessary for the Bahá'í community to make efforts within itself to present correct information about the Faith in published material. This can and must be done without violating the principle of freedom of expression, which, according to the teachings of the Faith, is a vital right of all persons.

Even in the world of journalism where the most libertine excesses of expression are stoutly defended on the grounds of constitutional protection, as is the case in the United States, serious questions are being raised about the accuracy of nonfiction books being published these days. An article in a recent issue of *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1991), that bastion of freedom of expression, devoted attention to such questions, querying the responsibility of publishers and editors and commenting on the sloppiness of some writers. It encourages reviewers of inaccurate books to take the publishers to task and to expose the authors' transgressions, pointing out, by quoting one such reviewer, that: "A newspaper can report one thing one day and revise or revoke the report the next day; a book makes a promise of much longer duration and far greater authority. The scale and presentation make a vital difference." But this has to do with review after publication. Among its suggestions for prepublication solutions to inaccuracy, the article offers the following thought to publishers: "They could pay in-house or outside researchers to request documentation from the author, then judge its worthiness. At the very least, they could pay for a spot check, then decide whether a full-scale review is necessary."

The positions you have taken in the third paragraph of your letter indicate an overreaction and a misconception of the real purpose of Bahá'í review. Is it not possible for Bahá'í academics to acknowledge the merit of the intention of this temporary requirement and, recognizing the sensitivity of the matter in view of the attitudes of the academic community, assist themselves and the Bahá'í institutions to find a balance between both academic and Bahá'í expectations? Bahá'í review is not an exercise in censorship; it is in large measure a benefit offered to an author by the Bahá'í institutions, which are, in fact, the major repositories of the source materials that ordinarily constitute the wellspring of the author's work and are for other reasons the channels of elucidation for a wide range of obscure questions relating to the Faith. Certainly, a dispassionate exploration by Bahá'í scholars of the issues concerning both the academic community and the Bahá'í institutions in this matter could result in the formulation of a rationale appropriate to aiding understanding in academic circles as to the nature and necessity of Bahá'í review. Bahá'í academics, after all, are, first and foremost, believers in the Cause of God and upholders of divine law.

The House of Justice has acknowledged in the past that the process of review is often irksome, frequently takes far too long and is subject to many problems in implementation. Nevertheless, it is convinced that this is not the time to remove this temporary procedure. National Spiritual Assemblies responsible for administering the reviewing procedure have been urged to do all they can to improve and expedite its operation, and efforts are continually being made to this end. The House of Justice looks forward to the day when this requirement will be definitely removed; in the meantime it may well be modified as conditions change.



With regard to your particular concerns, there is nothing in the current regulations that would prevent a scholar who has written a work to recommend to the National Spiritual Assembly one or more individuals whom he would like to see included among the reviewers selected by the Assembly. This approach offers the author a way of satisfying himself that he has had a direct part in the arrangement for review, and he can take confidence that some measure of peer review has been invested in the procedure.

The House of Justice trusts that this procedure will reduce your concerns and assures you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

30 October 1991

To Selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has requested us to send you the enclosed copy of a letter dated 28 October 1991 which we have written at its instruction to a believer who is an academic and who requested that consideration be given to changing the Bahá'í administrative policy requiring prepublication review of manuscripts authored by Bahá'ís. The concern expressed is that this policy contradicts values of free inquiry as perceived in academic circles and that submission to it could undermine scholarly credibility. As you will see from the enclosure, the House of Justice does not agree with this perception of Bahá'í review, but it sympathizes with the difficulties faced by Bahá'í academics in upholding and defending Bahá'í policy. Your attention is called particularly to the penultimate paragraph of the letter which mentions an approach intended to ease these difficulties and which can readily be accommodated by the current regulations on Bahá'í review.

The scholar who has authored a manuscript on a Bahá'í subject may recommend to the National Spiritual Assembly one or more individuals for inclusion among the reviewers selected by the Assembly. If for some particular reason the Assembly finds his nominees unacceptable, it may ask the author to submit other names for its consideration. While the National Assembly must retain control of the reviewing process and operate its reviewing mechanism as it sees fit, it must at the same time exercise a flexibility which will allow it to accommodate such a procedure. As in any other instance of review, the Assembly should exercise independent judgment as to the merits of the recommendations it receives from its appointed reviewers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

18 November 1991

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Every Land

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A time of challenge for the stalwart upholders of the Cause of God has now come upon us at the very moment when the world is grappling with tremendous problems, moral, social, economic and ecological. The Bahá'í community has grown in size and influence to the point where it is put to the test on all sides and at all levels. The opportunities are immense but we now face the question of whether to push forward with all speed, or to hold back because the resources available to us are inadequate for the purpose.

In lands where people have accepted the Faith in large numbers, the process of economic and social development, linked with the establishment, consolidation and strong functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies, is attaining ever greater importance and is placing upon the international resources of the Faith a heavy demand for manpower and finance. In the countries of the former Eastern Bloc the need for assistance in the form of Bahá'í literature, pioneers, traveling teachers, the establishment of local centers, is made the more urgent by the extraordinary receptivity to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh shown by the spiritually thirsty populations. The opportunities for the promotion of the Cause of God in these areas cannot be allowed to go unheeded.

At the national level, the structure of Bahá'í communities is growing in complexity as the number of believers rises, and National Spiritual Assemblies are being increasingly invited by national governments and nongovernmental organizations to offer advice and assistance in upholding human rights, in safeguarding the environment, in promoting moral education, and in overcoming the ravages of prejudice and the rising tide of lawlessness which are undermining the social structure. Internationally a parallel process is taking place.

At the World Center itself, the construction work on the Mount Carmel Projects has begun, preparing facilities befitting the central institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh for that time when they will have to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that will be thrust upon them as the Lesser Peace begins to be established in the world.

Over the past four years there was a steady increase in the contributions of the friends worldwide to the international funds of the Faith, and it had been our hope and expectation that this rise would continue and even be accelerated in the current year. But since last Riqḍán, on the contrary, there has been a sudden drop in contributions both to the international funds as a whole and to the Arc Projects Fund, creating a crisis which must be promptly overcome. In response to the growing needs of the teaching work and the Arc

Projects, we have for several years been drastically cutting the expenditure of the World Center, canceling or postponing many activities which, although valuable, cannot be pursued under the present condition of shortage of funds. This process cannot be taken much further without seriously hampering the ability of the World Center to function at the level which the interests of the Faith require.

If the financial needs of this year and those immediately ahead are to be met, the contributions to the international funds of the Cause must, far from decreasing, be substantially increased.

Such an effort will call for sacrifice on the part of individual believers and also for the diversion of funds from those local and national projects which are not essential. We are confident that the friends will respond to this call, as they did to the crisis precipitated by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 when, at one moment, 61% of the income of the international funds was cut off.

This is the immediate need. Beyond this there is, we believe, a worldwide need for appreciation of this basic principle of our Faith: that contributing to the Fund should constitute an integral part of the spiritual life of every Bahá'í and be regarded as the fulfillment of a fundamental spiritual obligation. In too many countries we have encountered a reluctance among the teachers of the Cause to include, in their presentation of the Teachings, support of the Fund as a natural part of Bahá'í life. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh more than once refers to the necessity for combining spiritual and material means in achieving the purposes of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi, for his part, referred to the Fund as the life-blood of the Cause.

We urge all the friends to give deep thought to the importance of supporting the Cause financially and to the effect that Bahá'í activities have on the condition of the entire human race.

It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that Bahá'u'lláh will inspire His devoted followers in every land to arise unitedly in the service of His Cause and will reward their sacrifices with an outpouring of heavenly bounties.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## The Universal House of Justice

26 November 1991

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On the occasion of the Day of the Covenant, amidst the dramatic events within and without the Faith which evince an accelerating momentum in the concluding months of the Six Year Plan, and less than half a year from the beginning of the long-anticipated Holy Year, we rejoice in conveying this triple announcement to the entire Bahá'í world.

Seven new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed at Riḍván 1992: Angola in Africa; Greenland in the Americas; and Albania, the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland in Europe. The emergence of the latter five will set a befitting seal on the victorious supplementary Two Year Plan launched at Riḍván 1990. In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Congo Republic, after a lapse of more than a decade due to political conditions, will be reestablished.

The Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has been established in the Holy Land under the direction of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, in anticipation of the worldwide application of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh next Riḍván. Concurrent with this development are the steps being taken by Dr. Varqá to organize regional and national Boards of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, following the example of the Board already functioning in the United States.

At Riḍván 1993, immediately following the Holy Year and during a period which will witness the holding of the Seventh Bahá'í International Convention at the World Center, a Three Year Plan will be launched. The national goals of this global Plan will be set through consultations between the Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. The unusual character and rapidity of developments both inside and outside the Faith signify the necessity for a short, flexible plan attuned to the dynamic nature of the times.

This momentous announcement, coinciding significantly with the opening of a new term for members of the Auxiliary Boards on all continents, is indicative of the fresh flood of divine confirmations pouring upon the current efforts of the Community of the Most Great Name in all parts of the planet. The coincidence demonstrates anew the existence of tremendous challenges and opportunities which must be met, and it calls attention to the vital role to be played by these distinguished servants of the Faith in aiding the believers everywhere to attain further heights in the unfolding glory of our great Cause.

We are moved to appeal to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land, at this critical moment in the destiny of the Cause and of humankind, to make a supreme effort to gather the as yet unharvested victories in the fast-fleeting days remaining to the Six Year Plan. Let them do this that they may enter, with a fit sense of

triumph, the impending Holy Year—a period charged with untold significance and pregnant with possibilities for major advances of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, possibilities which can only faintly be imagined as the Centenary of His Ascension draws closer.

Our ardent hopes for you all are intermingled with our supplications at the Holy Threshold that the Blessed Beauty may, to an unprecedented degree, rain down upon His loved ones His invigorating, victory-inducing confirmations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

9 December 1991

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 26 September 1991 which raises a number of questions concerning the exercise of your functions in situations where the Bahá'í laws are being violated. We have been asked to provide the following response.

Before commenting on your specific questions, the House of Justice feels it would be useful to review some aspects of the role of the Local and National Assemblies in regulating the behavior of the members of the Bahá'í community.

The aim of any Spiritual Assembly should be to develop a warm and loving relationship with the believers in its community, so that it can most effectively nurture and encourage them in the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the teachings, and can assist them to follow the Bahá'í principles in their personal conduct. The Assembly should aspire to being regarded by the members of the community as a loving parent, wise in its understanding of the varying degrees of maturity of those entrusted to its care, compassionate in dealing with the problems which arise as a result of any shortcomings, ever prepared to guide them to the correct path, and very patient as they strive to effect the necessary changes in their behavior. Such an approach is far removed from the harshly judgmental and punitive approach which so often characterizes the administration of law in the wider society. The Bahá'í application of justice, firmly rooted in spiritual principle and animated by the desire to foster the spiritual development of the members of the community, will increasingly be seen as a distinctive and highly attractive feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Such an attitude of forbearance, restraint, and patience toward believers who are striving to change practices and attitudes acquired in the years before they entered the sanctuary of the Cause of God should not blind a National Assembly to the fact that, at this stage in the development of the Faith, there may well be some believers in the community whose behavior necessitates that they be treated in a firm and uncompromising manner. The following passage from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian is of broad applicability:

He feels that your Assembly must keep before its eyes the balance specified by Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, in other words, justice, reward and retribution. Although the Cause is still young and tender, and many of the believers inexperienced, and therefore loving forbearance is often called for in the place of harsh measures, this does not mean that a National Spiritual Assembly can under any circumstances tolerate disgraceful

conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings, on the part of any of its members, whoever they may be and from wherever they may come....

The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith, a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable. They must be ever vigilant, ever on the look-out, ever ready to take action, and, on all matters of fundamental principle, refuse to compromise for an instant. Only in this way can the body of the Faith be free of disease.

... we should not confuse the true believers with those who are not quickened with the spirit of faith, have some ulterior motive, or are indifferent to the reputation they have personally, and the damage they may do the Cause in the eyes of the public. There is all the difference in the world between these two categories, and your Assembly must be ever watchful and ready to take action when necessary.

A survey of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian shows that he advised the National Spiritual Assemblies that they should resort to the severe sanction of deprivation of a believer's administrative rights only for such matters as "disgraceful conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings," "seriously injuring the Faith in the eyes of the public through his conduct or flagrantly breaking the laws of God," "gross immorality and open opposition to the administrative functions of the Faith, and disregard for the laws of personal status," "conduct which is disgracing the Cause," and "breaking of laws, such as the consent of parents to marriage," or "acts of such an immoral character as to damage the good name of the Faith."

It is clear that the removal of voting rights is a serious action which an Assembly should take reluctantly when the circumstances require that the Bahá'í community or its reputation in the eyes of the public must be protected from the effects of an individual's behavior, and where the authority of the laws of the Faith must be upheld. It should be the hope and prayer of the Assembly that the believer who has been administratively expelled from membership in the Bahá'í community will come to see that his behavior is in violation of the teachings, will endeavor to rectify his conduct, and will thus open the way to being welcomed back into the community so that he can lend his support to the vital and glorious task of establishing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Turning now to your questions: you have enquired about believers convicted of an offense in the civil courts. As you know, the Bahá'í institutions do not have a responsibility to enforce the criminal laws of a nation, although they do quite properly exhort the believers to obedience to government, which includes obedience to its laws. Violations of criminal law are handled by the civil courts of a country and enforced by its civil administration. The fact that a believer has been charged with a criminal offense, or is suspected of having committed such an offense, or is convicted by the court, should not automatically result in the application of Bahá'í sanctions. Each case is to be considered on its own merits, and in the light of the aforementioned considerations pertaining to the effect on the Bahá'í community and its reputation. For example, an Assembly would be most unlikely to consider imposition of sanctions on a Bahá'í convicted of violating the laws regulating automobile traffic flow, but it might well consider that a person known to be a Bahá'í convicted of selling narcotic drugs had brought disgrace to the name of the Faith and damaged its reputation before the public.



When an Assembly is aware that a believer is charged with a criminal offense, normally it should not pass judgment on the matter until a decision has been given in the courts, at which time it would consider whether it should impose administrative sanctions. There may be cases, however, when an Assembly is justified in taking certain actions to protect the interests of the Cause. Generally, the Assembly would regard the decision of the court as being valid in determining whether or not the Bahá'í was guilty of the stated offense, and would not undertake its own independent investigation. However, there may be special circumstances associated with a particular case, or with the reputation of the civil judicial system, which would incline an Assembly to decide that the verdict of the court should not be accepted as a basis for Bahá'í administrative action without further investigation by the Assembly; it is left to the Assembly to make that determination.

When an allegation is made that a believer has violated Bahá'í law, irrespective of the consequence in civil law, the process of investigation calls for a diligent and persistent effort by the Assembly to ascertain the facts, and for wholehearted cooperation of all concerned in the search for truth. Believers called upon to provide information should, if necessary, be reminded of the responsibility they bear to speak the truth and of the spiritual consequences of a failure to do so. 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts:

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness, progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

If this "holy attribute" should adorn the behavior of believers toward others, how much more should it characterize the statements which a Bahá'í makes to a divinely ordained institution.

The prospect of a believer's displaying an attitude of hostility, when being interviewed by a Spiritual Assembly or its representatives who are seeking to determine the facts of a matter, is abhorrent. All believers are strongly enjoined to have the utmost respect for the Assemblies, to cooperate fully with them, and to support their decisions. An Assembly enquiring into a matter should not allow itself to be deterred by the hostility of a believer who is withholding relevant information; it should appeal to him for cooperation, remind him forcefully of his responsibilities and, in extreme cases such as threats made to the investigators, warn him of the administrative consequences of the persistence of his deplorable conduct.

When an Assembly comes to the point where it must make a decision in the face of conflicting assertions and insistent denials, it might well recall the advice of the Guardian:

... when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote....

A believer who is distressed by the decision reached by an Assembly as a result of its investigation may well find comfort and reassurance in the following passage from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Bahá'í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies....

As regards the need to warn an individual before his voting rights are removed, the basic principle is expressed in the following passage written on behalf of the Guardian:

... before anyone is deprived of their voting rights, they should be consulted with and lovingly admonished at first, given repeated warnings if they do not mend their immoral ways, or whatever other extremely serious misdemeanor they are committing, and finally, after these repeated warnings, be deprived of their voting rights.

There are, however, many different ways in which this is applied, depending upon the nature of the offense and the situation in each case.

For example, when there is an isolated but serious offense, such as that of a Bahá'í woman who indulges in one act of immorality as a result of which she gives birth to a child out of wedlock, this is no grounds for the removal of administrative rights. But the Assembly, when it learns of the situation, should certainly arrange for the believer to be met and consulted with, to assist her in her difficulties, to ascertain her attitude to the situation. If she has no regret for the offense and indicates that she feels free to repeat it in future, she will need to be educated in the teachings, counseled and, if she does not change her attitude, to be warned that a continuation of such actions would cause forfeiture of her administrative rights. If, however, she is contrite and is determined to lead a moral life henceforth, there would be no question of sanctions. The same course would be followed with the man involved, if he were a Bahá'í.

Another example would involve, not a single offense, but a continuing course of behavior, such as flagrant and continuing violation of the law prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages. In such a situation the Assembly should explain the law to the believer, urge him to obey it, encourage and assist him and warn him if necessary. If the response is favorable there would, again, be no need to deprive him of his administrative rights, but, if the believer is obdurate or continues in his course of misbehavior, he should, according to the circumstances of each case, be warned and warned again, with increasing severity and a time set for him to rectify his conduct. If this produces no amelioration, he would have to lose his administrative rights.

A third example involves the taking of a definite step which violates a clear law with which the believer is familiar. In this instance, the Assembly may conclude that the believer has been warned repeatedly of the consequences of such behavior through statements in widely circulated Bahá'í publications or in the deepening which a member of the community might reasonably be expected to have received. Into this category would fall the offenses against the Bahá'í requirement of parental consent to marriage, and the violations of law about which general warnings have been given in your newsletter.

Circumstances may arise where the offense is so serious that immediate action is required by the National Assembly to protect the Faith. In this connection, it is stated in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian:

You should vigilantly watch over and protect the interests of the Bahá'í Community, and the moment you see that any of the ... Bahá'ís ... are acting in a way to bring disgrace upon the name of the Faith, warn them, and, if necessary, deprive them immediately of their voting rights if they refuse to change their ways. Only in this way can the purity of the Faith be preserved. Compromise and weak measures will obscure the vision of its followers, sap its strength, lower it in the eyes of the public and prevent it from making any progress.

The Universal House of Justice has stated that, in matters concerning the deprivation of voting rights, an Assembly should bear in mind that, at the present time, when Bahá'í laws are being progressively applied and a sizeable proportion of a community consists of newly declared believers, an Assembly may accept ignorance of the Bahá'í law as a valid excuse when it is convinced that such ignorance existed; great wisdom is required in the application of this provision, since it is not unknown for a believer guilty of flagrant misconduct to attempt to escape the administrative consequence of his behavior through a fervent but spurious claim of ignorance of the law.

In deciding whether or not to remove voting rights, every case should be considered on its merits and in light of the particular circumstances. The purpose of the administrative sanction should be borne clearly in mind in deciding how much weight to give to factors such as the passage of time, the extent to which the individual concerned has experienced an adverse reaction in the Bahá'í community, the degree of suffering and contrition exhibited by the believer whose status is being questioned, his stature in the Bahá'í community or the wider society, and media publicity of his delinquent behavior. While there is room for compassion, this should not deflect you from giving due consideration to the responsibility you bear to protect the community and its good name, and to uphold the authority of Bahá'í law.

It is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to decide whether to notify the community when a believer has been deprived of his administrative rights; the Assembly is also free to decide how such a notification is to be made, and whether or not the reasons for the deprivation are to be disclosed. Such decisions might be made with regard to the purposes which would be served by such an announcement, and the benefit to the community of this knowledge. If a believer advises you of an appeal to the Universal House of Justice against your decision to withdraw his voting rights, he remains without these rights while the merit of his appeal is being assessed by the House of Justice; it would generally be preferable not to make an announcement to the community about his loss of voting rights while the appeal is being considered, but special circumstances, such as the imperative need to protect the Bahá'í community from his actions, could compel you to do otherwise.

When a believer is deprived of his administrative rights, he is entitled to clear information on the requirements to be fulfilled in order that his rights may be restored; these may include the passage of a prescribed period of time, the performance of certain remedial actions, or the alteration of an attitude or pattern of behavior which is considered unworthy or harmful. A condition for the restoration of voting

rights is that the believer be repentant, as evidenced by his statement to that effect or by his demeanor and conduct. A believer should not feel compelled to admit his past errors in order to be regarded as repentant; you can infer repentance from his behavior, his manifest spirit of cooperation with the Assembly, and his evident desire to scrupulously adhere to the teachings. Should he display a rebellious or resentful attitude, or be contemptuous of Bahá'í law and the consequence of violation of its provisions, you would be justified in denying him the right to reenter the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice is fully cognizant of the difficulties encountered by National Spiritual Assemblies in administering Bahá'í law at this period in history when the world is afflicted with lawlessness, moral decadence, and confusion. The institutions of the Cause are called upon to guide and regulate the conduct of the believers so that the Bahá'í community may offer, to both seeker and skeptic, a compelling proof of the transforming power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. By this means will humankind be led to accept the truth of His claim, and will thereby be enabled to find that unity and harmony for which it is so desperately yearning. Upon this foundation will be constructed the future world civilization which humanity is destined to attain.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

8 April 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With sorrowful hearts we have received confirmation of the execution in Evin Prison in Tehran on 18 March 1992 of Mr. Bahman Samandarí, member of a distinguished Bahá'í family who had been active in the affairs of the Bahá'í community. No reason for his execution has been given by the judicial or prison authorities, nor have they disclosed the location of his grave.

This tragic surprise is the more shocking for the fact that the whole matter has been shrouded in secrecy. The execution was kept quiet for more than two weeks; no advance information was given to the family; no subsequent announcement about it was made; the news of it was broken to Mr. Samandarí's widow only when she attempted to visit him on 5 April, the date given her by the authorities after they had denied her permission to see him despite her several previous attempts since his arrest on 17 March. The manner of informing her of his death was to hand her her husband's will, which had been written on 18 March. No

death certificate was issued, although inquiries by the Samandarí family at the office of the Tehran general cemetery brought the response that the name of Bahman Samandarí had been entered into its records.

No official charge or verdict was announced, assiduous inquiries by the family members producing only a vague indication that Mr. Samandarí's execution had to do with his previous arrest four years ago when he and four other Bahá'ís were arrested for meeting in his home. At that time, 21 October 1987, charges were leveled against him because of his membership in the Bahá'í community. He and his fellow prisoners were released on 18 December 1987, after the title to Mr. Samandarí's home had been turned over to the authorities along with a large sum of money as bail.

The timing and suddenness of the matter and the duplicity on the part of the authorities are also a cause of bafflement. Mr. Samandarí was summoned by the authorities on 17 March ostensibly to receive a document from them. On 18 March, the date of his will which was handed to Mrs. Samandarí by the Evin Prison authorities, he was killed. On 20 March he was buried. These events took place at the time of the approach of the long public holiday associated with the Iranian new year, an obviously inconvenient time for inquiries.

It is a source of outrage to the international Bahá'í community that after a cessation of executions of Bahá'ís for a period of three and a half years, such a brutal act could again be perpetrated against an innocent community. It belies the position publicly and repeatedly affirmed by the Iranian Government that Bahá'ís are not being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

As further details become known, they will be sent to you....

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Riḍván 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Riḍván season, with its inherent splendors 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 favors 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, splendors 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 fulfillment of divine purpose—fulfillment, 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 Center 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 programs, 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 nongovernmental 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 nongovernmental 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 nongovernmental 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, traveling 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 Center 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 Counselors 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 Center 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 worldwide 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 Rídván 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 Rídván 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-Muḥammad Varqá will attend those of Greenland and of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. At the remaining Conventions our representatives will be Counselors: 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 Honor 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 Center 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 Ḥuqúqu'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 splendor the Blessed Beauty may fill the souls of each and all of you with the revivifying breath of His celestial power.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

7 June 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

As we reflect on the events which a few days ago marked the commemoration in the Holy Land of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, we feel impelled to express to the Bahá'í world our sense of wonderment at the exalted character of what transpired. The nature of the Anniversary was in itself awe-inspiring and evocative of profound emotion. But the gathering of some 3,000 Bahá'ís, including 113 Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, representing no less than 200 countries and dependent territories—the widest diversity of human beings ever to have assembled on a Bahá'í occasion—filled the eyes with the vision of a garden of humanity that overwhelmed the senses, inducing a spirit of beauty, joy and splendor. Bahjí was never more resplendent. And we offer prayers of thanksgiving to our beloved Lord that so fitting an assemblage could have been realized on this special Anniversary, indicating the amazing extent to which the pervasive power of His influence has triumphed throughout the world.

May the evident blessings flowing from this heavenly experience infuse the dear friends everywhere with new strength and fresh encouragement, emboldening their efforts and enlarging their capacity to proclaim the Name and promote the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh during the course of the Holy Year so auspiciously begun.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

On the Occasion of the Centenary Commemoration at Bahjí of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

A Tribute by The Universal House of Justice

With soul-stirring emotion we gather in the hallowed environs of His resting place to honor the memory of the Supreme Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, on the solemn, historic occasion of the centenary of His ascension.

We lift our voices at the prompting of our hearts' desire to pay tribute to a life infinitely beyond compare. But how shall we realize such a wish when it is evident that no mind can attain the comprehension which would make possible the vocabulary worthy of His celestial court? In very truth, our tongues falter in their impotence to describe, let alone extol, the prodigies of a prophetic career which was framed in superlatives. For here at Bahjí, one hundred years ago, was drawn the last breath on earth of the world's greatest Luminary, Founder of the Dispensation marking the culmination of the six-thousand-year-old Adamic Cycle, and Inaugurator of the five-thousand-century Bahá'í Cycle. He, the Most Great Manifestation, appeared in the Most Great Name and endured the greatest suffering in authoring the Most Great Revelation, which is the wellspring of the Most Great Peace. In our attempt to appreciate these matchless bounties, we recite the gem-like names of the Adored One, picked out as pearls from the veritable ocean of

His Revelation, bestrewing them throughout our testimonial that they may lend an acceptable gleam to our expression of His glory and majesty.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Supreme Mediator, Most Ancient Beauty: He is the Well-Beloved of all worlds. We hail Him as the long-awaited Promised One, the Object of the adoration of the world. And we exclaim: "Hallowed be the Lord in Whose hand is the source of dominion!"

How grievously Bahá'u'lláh suffered to regenerate the world! Wrongly accused, imprisoned, beaten, chained, banished from country to country, betrayed, poisoned, stripped of material possessions, and "at every moment tormented with a fresh torment": such was the cruel reception that greeted the Everlasting Father, Him Who is the Possessor of all Names and Attributes. For two score years, until the end of His earthly days, He remained a prisoner and exile—persecuted unceasingly by the rulers of Persia and the Ottoman Empire, opposed relentlessly by a vicious and scheming clergy, neglected abjectly by other sovereigns to whom He addressed potent letters imparting to them that which, in His truth-bearing words, "is the cause of the well-being, the unity, the harmony, and the reconstruction of the world, and of the tranquility of the nations." "My grief," He once lamented, "exceedeth all the woes to which Jacob gave vent, and all the afflictions of Job are but a part of My sorrows."

The voice halts for shame from continuing so deplorable a recitation, the heart is torn by mere thought of the Divine Target of such grief—grief no ordinary mortal could endure. But lest we give way to feelings of gloom and distress, we take recourse in the tranquil calm He induces with such meaningful words as these: "We have borne it all with the utmost willingness and resignation, so that the souls of men may be edified, and the Word of God be exalted." Thus, the Wronged One, patient beyond measure, preserved a majestic composure, revealing His true Self as the Merciful, the Loving, the Incomparable Friend. Concentrating His energies on the pivotal purpose of His Revelation, He transmuted His tribulations into instruments of redemption and summoned all peoples to the banner of unity.

No worldly power could thwart the purpose of the Most Exalted Pen. Through the copiousness of His writings, He poured upon the planet the healing waters of the Word of God renewed. Descending upon Him like a spring rain, His Revelation comprises some one hundred volumes—"volumes replete with unnumbered exhortations, revolutionizing principles, world-shaping laws and ordinances, dire warnings and portentous prophecies, with soul-uplifting prayers and meditations, illuminating commentaries and interpretations, impassioned discourses and homilies, all interspersed with either addresses or references to kings, to emperors and to ministers, of both the East and the West, to ecclesiastics of divers denominations, and to leaders in the intellectual, political, literary, mystical, commercial and humanitarian spheres of human activity." Foremost among His Books is His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the charter of the future world civilization in which He has announced the Laws of God for this age. Our hearts thrill to the prospect that during the course of this centennial year, the annotated English translation of this Mother Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is to be published. We acknowledge with astonished joy the prolific legacy of this divine outpouring. And we exclaim: "Praised be Thou, Who art the Desire of the world, and thanks be to Thee, O Well-Beloved of the hearts of such as are devoted to Thee!"

Today, we bear witness to the further abundance of a peerless heritage. With the setting of the Sun of Bahá, the Moon of His Covenant rose in reflected glory, lifting the darkness of a night of despair, and lighting the path to the unity of all humankind. In the fullness of its radiance stands the magnetic Figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the beloved Son Whom Bahá’u’lláh designated as the Interpreter of His Word and Executive of His authority, and Whom He appointed the Center of His Covenant, an office without parallel in all religious history.

We acknowledge the mysterious power of His wisdom, the illuminating potency of His words, the immortal example and unific character of His deeds. By His untiring exertions the fame of the infant Cause was spread abroad, the design of its Administrative Order was completed, the World Center of the Faith emerged into clear visibility, and the splendors of the Mountain of God, as alluded to in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Carmel, began to be manifested. With profound gratitude for such evident blessings we reaffirm our loyalty to the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. And we exclaim: “Glorified be the All-Merciful, the Lord of Grace abounding!”

As a result of the phenomenal effects of His Covenant, a world community has been raised up on an “unassailable foundation.” The entire system of the Administrative Order originated by Bahá’u’lláh in His Most Holy Book has been erected. A vigorous network of local, national, continental and international institutions functions in exemplary harmony throughout the planet. Vitalized and nurtured by His stupendous Revelation, watered by the precious blood of countless martyrs, and tended by the loving care of unnumbered, devoted servants, the Tree of the Cause has, in these hundred years, grown mightily, has put forth its far-stretching branches and borne its first and plentiful fruit.

Bahá’u’lláh found the world in a “strange sleep.” But what a disturbance His coming has unloosed! The peoples of the earth had been separated, many parts of the human race socially and spiritually isolated. But the world of humanity today bears little resemblance to that which Bahá’u’lláh left a century ago. Unbeknownst to the great majority, His influence permeates all living beings. Indeed, no domain of life remains unaffected. In the burgeoning energy, the magnified perspectives, the heightened global consciousness; in the social and political turbulence, the fall of kingdoms, the emancipation of nations, the intermixture of cultures, the clamor for development; in the agitation over the extremes of wealth and poverty, the acute concern over the abuse of the environment, the leap of consciousness regarding the rights of women; in the growing tendency towards ecumenism, the increasing call for a new world order; in the astounding advances in the realms of science, technology, literature and the arts—in all this tumult, with its paradoxical manifestations of chaos and order, integration and disintegration, are the signs of His power as World Reformer, the proof of His claim as Divine Physician, the truth of His Word as the All-Knowing Counselor.

Bahá’u’lláh wrote voluminously about the purpose of this mysterious force and its transformative effects, but the essence can be drawn from these few perspicuous words: “Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration.” And again: “A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none



hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.” And yet again: “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 the denizens of the earth wake from their slumber at the resonances of His Name and arise from their confused dreams to embrace the clarity of the new Day: For “This is the King of Days, the Day that hath seen the coming of the Best-beloved, Him Who through all eternity hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World.”

Our thoughts turn back to the mourning time in 1892 when a vast number of residents from the surrounding area came to join His bereaved followers in lamenting the departure of the immortal Beloved. These were not adherents of His Cause and had no real understanding of His station, but the effect of His presence among them was such as to fill them with a grave sense of loss. Today, a century later, it is we, who identify ourselves with His community, who have come in multitudinous array from the far corners of the earth to pay homage to the King of Glory. With us in spirit are the millions of His lovers scattered among tens of thousands of villages, towns and cities, themselves observing in their own localities this solemn anniversary, their hearts focused on the Primal Spot here at Bahjí.

And among us at this Point of Adoration are a number of the heroic souls from the celebrated company who earned the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon them by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause—this to signify their acts of daring and devotion as teachers of the Faith. It is they who were in the vanguard during the triumphant Ten Year World Crusade. Their exploits, built upon the dramatic feats of the Heroic Age and the sacrifices of countless martyrs and heroes of the past, and following the trail blazed by earlier teachers of the Faith, realized the actual establishment of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh as a world religion.

Now, on this commemorative occasion, the Roll of Honor on which the names of the Knights have been inscribed is being deposited by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine in the spot designated by our beloved Guardian. This is both a symbol and a promise—a symbol registering the reality of a clear response, at a critical time, to the duty laid upon us by the Lord of Hosts to diffuse His teachings among all peoples; a promise that the commitment so dazzlingly displayed by these intrepid pioneers will be reaffirmed by generations of their successors, ensuring that the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, “shining in all its power and glory, will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet.”

This is also a mark of recognition of the power of the Hand of Omnipotence to turn gnats into eagles. His bounties embolden us. Broken-winged birds are we; yet, with His assurances resounding in our souls, we soar to ever greater heights in His service. “I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty!” He declares, benevolently adding: “I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight.” How then can we fail?

We here make this vow: With a stirring history of divine support behind us and a clear vision of unfolding destiny before us, we move onward, renewed, reconsecrated, resolute, until the consciousness of every human being has been touched by the knowledge of God's triumphant Faith. And, intoning the expectant words of His Martyr-Herald, we exclaim: "Exalted be His glory, and magnified be His might, and sanctified be His holiness, and glorified be His grandeur, and lauded be His ways!"

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

24 June 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As you are already aware from previous communications, the Bahá'í Holy Places and other properties and endowments belonging to the Bahá'í community of Iran are still under government control. Many have been desecrated or demolished and the sites used for constructing roads or other buildings.

Among these confiscated properties was the once beautiful and well-kept Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran. It has been desecrated and the headstones and marble coverings of the graves were removed and later sold in auctions. All identification marks on the graves were obliterated, and a school and playground are being built on this site.

The Bahá'í community had owned a large piece of property to the south of Tehran which was intended for use as the future cemetery of the Tehran Bahá'í community. This was also confiscated and all petitions to regain it have been fruitless. Instead, a small, barren piece of land without any public service or utilities was assigned to the Bahá'ís of Tehran by the Iranian Government for use as a burial site for their dead. However, neither headstones nor any identification of the individual graves are permitted on that site. A Bahá'í friend living in the United States, who visited Iran in October 1991, has described it as very depressing. The bodies of the dead have to be prepared for burial at home or water has to be fetched for that purpose from a Christian cemetery in the neighborhood....

It should be recalled that most of the Bahá'í cemeteries in Iran have been desecrated or demolished and that thousands of Bahá'ís who wish to visit these cemeteries in order to pray for their departed relatives are either denied access, or they return with grieved hearts after witnessing the deplorable condition of the graves of their loved ones. Moreover, many of the Bahá'í martyrs executed in prison have been buried in areas not even known to their relatives.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

25 June 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice deeply regrets to inform you that, following earlier reports received from members of the Ghedami family residing in Canada and the United States, the friends in Iran have now confirmed that Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Ghedami, a staunch member of their community, has become the victim of a brutal murder at the hands of two members of the Iranian Disciplinary Forces.

The following details are reported by the friends in Iran:

Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Ghedami was 65 years of age. He used to be employed by the Iranian Railway Company and was dismissed from work. He was a farmer in the village of Muẓaffaríyyih near Islám-Shahr for about 20 years. His wife and five of his children are living outside of Iran.

Mr. Ghedami had a great love for the Faith and would often talk about it to non-Bahá'ís. Towards the end of 1370 (1991), he started associating with a member of the Disciplinary Forces of the Government of Iran and began talking to him about the Faith. These conversations continued for a while until he was officially asked, in that same year, to report to one of the police stations in the town of Rayy. He was then given a questionnaire with 40 items which were all answered by him. Mr. Ghedami later explained to one of his friends that all the questions related to Bahá'í subjects.

On 25/3/71 (15 June 1992), at 11:00 p.m., a man in uniform came to Mr. Ghedami's house in a car without a license plate, and told Mr. Ghedami that he had come to arrest him. The neighbors insisted that the uniformed man should come back on the following day, but he paid no attention and took Mr. Ghedami with him. There were two other individuals sitting in the car. Following this event, there was no news of Mr. Ghedami for several days and all the police stations claimed that they knew nothing about him.

On 27/3/71 (17 June 1992), a man by the name of Sulaymán 'Aynu'lláhí, who used to live in Muẓaffaríyyih a few years ago, entered Mr. Ghedami's house with a key that he had in his possession. He claimed that he had purchased the house from Mr. Ghedami and told the tenant to vacate it.

The tenant reported the matter to the police who then summoned Sulaymán 'Aynu'lláhi and his brother, Raḥmán 'Aynu'lláhi, both guards in the Disciplinary Forces. After the interrogations and investigations carried out by the Office of Criminal Investigation, it was determined that these two brothers had forced Mr. Ghedami to give them a letter attesting to the sale of his property, following which they strangled him, and then drove the body 60 kilometers outside Tehran on the Qum Highway, where they set fire to it, using gasoline.

The body was found several days later by the Ḥasanábád Police Station and was transferred to the coroner's office to be examined by a doctor. It was identified with great difficulty because it was so badly burnt. The body is still in the coroner's office and is supposed to be transferred to the Bahá'í Cemetery on 4/4/71 (25 June 1992).

The friends in Iran conclude by reporting that the murderers are now in custody, but that the facts about this case have been only partially registered in the official records. They are certain that the murder took place as a result of religious prejudice and because of Mr. Ghedami's teaching activities. Whether the authorities had any previous knowledge of this murder is not known....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

3 September 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to inform you of the following disturbing news just received from the Bahá'í friends in Iran....

Messrs. Bihnám Mítháqí and Kayván Khalajábádí, two active Iranian Bahá'ís who were arrested three years ago and are still being held at the Gohardasht Prison in Karaj near Tehran, have recently been called to the prison authorities where they were orally informed that an Islamic Revolutionary Court has issued a verdict condemning them to death.

The friends in Iran had earlier reported that, as an unprecedented gesture, the Iranian authorities had instructed these two Bahá'í prisoners to choose Muslim lawyers to defend them. Presumably, this was an exercise designed to impress Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, who was due to visit Iran at that time. Such lawyers were eventually engaged

by the Bahá'ís, but, having taken some initial steps regarding the two defendants, they found themselves unable to continue and resigned. Therefore, the trial which resulted in the death sentences for the two Bahá'ís took place without any lawyers defending them. Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí have appealed against these verdicts to a higher court in Iran, but the outcome is uncertain....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

7 September 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice was pleased to receive replies from a number of National Spiritual Assemblies in response to our communication of 3 September 1992, reporting the actions they have taken in regard to two Bahá'í prisoners in Iran, Messrs. Bihnám Mítháqí and Kayván Khalajábádí. Although it is not possible at present to answer all the questions raised concerning these two friends, we have been asked to share with you the following background information gleaned from the records thus far available.

Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí were members of a group of three well-known Bahá'ís of Karaj who were assisting the Bahá'ís in that community. At the time of their arrest they were also helping Bahá'í children in their studies. Mr. Mítháqí is 30 years of age and married. Mr. Khalajábádí is of similar age, but his marital status is not known.

Following their arrest on 29 April 1989, they were taken together to the Gohardasht Prison in Karaj for interrogation. Although their cases are similar in many ways, they do differ in some details and it is assumed, therefore, that they are being dealt with separately by the authorities. Both prisoners had been seen by Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, in Evin Prison on his last visit to Iran in December 1991, and he later reported that they appeared to be in bad health. Further information about each of these cases is set forth below.

**Bihnám Mítháqí**—After being arrested on 29 April 1989, he was taken to the Gohardasht Prison and put into solitary confinement for an unspecified period. On 19 June 1989, the Islamic Court in Karaj condemned him to eight years' imprisonment on charges of "spying for the Bahá'í organization." He appealed this verdict to the Islamic Court at Evin Prison, and a second verdict issued on 12 May 1990 by

that Court sentenced him to three years' imprisonment and 15 lashes. The time already served in prison was not counted against this new term.

Following this, there was a further appeal by Mr. Mitháqí's wife, Maryam, resulting in another judgment, and later still he had a fourth trial. All charges and sentences were communicated to him verbally and not in writing.

When Mr. Galindo Pohl asked him why he had not taken a lawyer for his defense, he replied that he did not have the means and, in any case, this would not be useful as a Government lawyer, instead of defending him, would only advise him to admit to the accusations made against him in order to obtain a reduction of his sentence. As you have already been informed, he was recently condemned to death.

**Kayván Khalajábádí**—Having been arrested at his home three years ago by the Revolutionary Guards, he was taken to Gohardasht Prison in Karaj, where he was interrogated about not being in the army and trying to go abroad. After five days of interrogation all his Bahá'í books were confiscated and he was put into solitary confinement for 30 days. After a second interrogation he was put in a very small cell for 51 days. The interrogators and judges were Muslim clerics and they all asked him the same questions. At one stage, he was pressured to sign a paper that he was not allowed to read and when he refused to sign it he was insulted and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment on the charge of "spying for the Bahá'í party."

Mr. Khalajábádí objected to this sentence and appealed to a higher court. Later, the deputy director of the prison asked him if he was still a Bahá'í. When he responded in the affirmative, he was put in solitary confinement for six months and condemned to receive 50 lashes. In a third sentencing he was condemned to death on charges of "spying for the government occupying Jerusalem." He appealed again and, as of December 1991, was awaiting his fourth trial.

All charges and sentences were conveyed to him orally only. On several occasions pressure was brought to bear on him in an unsuccessful attempt to force him to admit that he had been engaged in the activities defined in the charges against him.

... Additional information will be shared with you if and when it becomes available.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

10 September 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to our communication dated 7 September 1992 concerning the two condemned Bahá'í prisoners in Iran, Messrs. Bihná́m Mítháqí and Kayván Khalajábádí, the Bahá'ís in Iran have reported that the relatives of these two prisoners have submitted their complaints against the death sentences in writing to the Iranian Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor's Office and to the Office of General Investigation....

The following details which have been provided by the believers in Iran may be shared only with your government contacts at present:

Personal information about the prisoners:

Mr. Bihná́m Mítháqí was born in 1962, is married and has a six-year-old daughter.

Mr. Kayván Khalajábádí was born in 1960 and is single.

Arrest and Sentencing:

Both men were arrested by the Islamic Revolutionary Committee of Rajá'í on 29 April 1989 in Gohardasht and were held at Gohardasht Prison for a period of time. Later they were transferred to Evin Prison.

Their first trial took place at Branch Number 1 of the Office of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Karaj and, according to Court Order Number 1/209/78 dated 19 June 1989, they were sentenced to eight years' correctional imprisonment on the charge of "Spying activities of the Espionage Sect of Bahá'ísm." The sentences were effective as of 19 June 1989. Both prisoners appealed their sentences under File Number 13815/68 V-1.

Following the appeal of the above sentences, a second verdict was issued on 12 May 1990 at Branch Number 4 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran, at Evin, in which they are accused of "Administrative activities within the Bahá'ísm Group." Both were sentenced to three years' imprisonment effective as of 12 May 1990, plus 50 lashes. Both prisoners protested against this sentence as well and appealed it.

A third sentence was issued on 30 April 1991 by Branch Number 3 of the Revolutionary Court which stated the following: "On the charges of involvement in administrative activities of Zionist Bahá'ísm and continued spying activities for the Espionage Sect of Bahá'ísm, and spying for the Zionist Regime of Iraq, and for the usurping Regime of Israel, the accused are sentenced to death." Both prisoners again protested against and appealed their sentences.

On 29 October 1991, the Iranian authorities orally informed Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí of their right to hire a lawyer. After necessary investigations, two Muslim lawyers were requested to take on their cases. One of them visited the Office of the Revolutionary Court in order to file, as is customary, in the presence of the accused, a letter of appointment to act as their lawyer, but he was threatened by the officials of that Office who warned him about the consequences of his involvement in these cases. Hence, on returning from

that Office he refused to accept the position. The second lawyer, being aware of the situation, refused to even visit the Office of the Revolutionary Court to file the appointment letter. All of this took place prior to Mr. Galindo Pohl's arrival in Iran.

On 24 August 1992, another sentence was issued by Branch Number 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which was conveyed to the prisoners by Branch Number 6, Department of Law Enforcement of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, under Reference Number 2149/J-A. The text of this sentence states the following: "On the charges of membership in the administration of Zionist Bahá'ísm and continued activities for the realization of its goals and also for spying for the regime occupying Jerusalem, in accordance with the verse number 38 of the Súrih of Má'idih of the Holy Qur'án, and Article Number 198 of the Islamic Penal Code, they are sentenced to death." (File Number 15733/68/B/2/1) After orally conveying the sentence to the prisoners, the authorities informed them that they should prepare themselves for their execution. Both prisoners again protested against this verdict.

Manner of trials held and informing the prisoners of the verdicts, and the filing of their appeals:

During the trials only the presiding judge, a Court secretary and the accused were allowed to be present. These Court cases and verdicts have not been publicized in the media at all.

When the prisoners protested against their sentences orally and demanded to have something in writing, the law enforcement officer copied by hand on a letterhead of the Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution what appeared to be the text of the original verdict, but without any signature. He then instructed the prisoners to sign that copy which would be used by him as evidence that the Court sentence was communicated to them. At the same time, he informed the prisoners that in case they wished to appeal their sentences, they could do so on the same piece of paper. This the prisoners have done. However, the original verdict, which was in the possession of the officer, was not shown to the prisoners at all.

At no time in the above-mentioned stages of sentencing did the accused receive any official verdict themselves. In one case only an unsigned copy was provided to them.

The friends in Iran commented that the above-mentioned method of repeated appeals is quite unusual as normally after a second appeal, the Court sentences are carried out without any possibility of further appeal and that the cases of these two prisoners are, therefore, quite unprecedented.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

30 September 1992



To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are instructed to convey to you the following disturbing news which was just received from the friends in Iran.

During the past few weeks, Iranian Islamic revolutionary institutions in Yazd, Tehran, and Isfahan have confiscated a considerable number of private homes and other property belonging to Bahá'ís. The Bahá'ís concerned are neither prominent believers nor were they engaged in Bahá'í administrative activities.

The friends in Iran explained that, in Yazd, these confiscations are based on a religious edict issued to the Judiciary by the late Áyatu'lláh Şadúqí, former Imam of Yazd, on the strength of which the members of the Imam Khomeini Foundation are seizing the homes of Bahá'ís and are harassing the occupants. The late Áyatu'lláh, in turn, had taken this action on the instigation of a certain Mr. Kashmírí, who had played an active role in the oppression of the Bahá'ís in Yazd and was keenly interested in their properties. The details are as follows.

Yazd

In Yazd, 11 families are presently affected by such confiscations. Mr. Dáryúsh Dahmúbidí's family, residing in Taft, was already forcefully evicted and their house with all its furnishings was taken over by the Imam Khomeini Foundation.

The families of 10 other Bahá'ís named below were served notice by the Islamic revolutionary institutions to vacate their homes and hand them over to the Government. Although, due to their protestations and appeals to higher authorities, their evacuation has not yet taken place, they are under severe pressure to relinquish their homes.

1. Mr. 'Atá'u'lláh Lur
2. Mr. Khudáyár Akhtarkhávarí
3. Mrs. Írándukht Hakhámanishí
4. Mr. Jamshíd Lur
5. Mr. Ghulám-Husayn Shádpúr
6. Mr. Panj'alí A'rábí
7. Mr. Rúhu'lláh Rustamí
8. Mr. Habíbu'lláh Tafakkurí
9. Mr. 'Atá'u'lláh Rustamí

#### 10. Mr. Adíb Dánishniyá

##### Tehran

In Tehran, three cases were reported, as follows:

Mrs. Mihrangíz Rawḥání, who had been dismissed from her position as midwife at the Public Health Department, was served an order by the Islamic Revolutionary Court that her house was confiscated. As a result of her appeals, no action has been taken yet by the Court, but the case is not resolved.

A complex consisting of a large shop and 10 apartments, as well as a two-storey residential building, belonging to Mr. Qudratu'lláh Ḥishmatí were occupied by members of the Imam Khomeini Foundation against the will of the owner, in this case without any official order from the judicial authorities. Unfortunately, his appeals and complaints to the authorities have not succeeded in restoring the property to him so far.

Mrs. Mawhibatí was forcefully evicted from her home after being served an order by the Attorney-General that her house was confiscated.

##### Isfahan

In Isfahan, the following cases were reported:

Mrs. Bádkúbí'í had donated a two-storey building to a Bahá'í institution before the Islamic Revolution, retaining tenancy for life in one apartment while renting out the other as her only source of income. Although, according to Islamic and civil law, she is entitled to occupy the building for life and no one has the right to eject her from it, she has been pressured to vacate the house, and the authorities have already compelled the tenant of the other apartment to leave the premises as well.

Perhaps the most tragic case is that of Mr. Aḥmad Ishráqí, resident of Isfahan, who is over 80 years of age. In mid-September 1992, several Government officers invaded his home and took away all his books, numbering several thousand volumes. They ejected him from his home and took possession of the building. Mr. Ishráqí was not able to take anything with him and is now dependent on his friends. No appeal or complaint has been entertained by the authorities concerning his case.

Furthermore, officers of the Attorney-General of Isfahan have entered eight Bahá'í homes during the past two weeks, taking away books, household items, radios, television sets, recorders, cameras, and cash. The Bahá'í owners have lodged complaints with the judicial authorities, but without any result so far.

The Universal House of Justice is concerned that this sudden intensification of actions against the Bahá'ís, taken almost simultaneously in different centers in Iran, may signal the beginning of a new phase in the persecution of the sorely tried friends in the Cradle of the Faith....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

30 September 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Holy Year is approaching its midway point and the time is ripe for all National Spiritual Assemblies to consult with the Counselors to formulate national goals for the Three Year Plan which will be launched next Riqvân.

The experience you gained in formulating and then carrying out the goals of the Six Year Plan can now enable you to refine the process in relation to the Three Year Plan. The main theme for the Bahá'í community during the Three Year Plan will be to pursue three closely related developments which can be summarized as enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of its local and national institutions.

We are asking the Counselors to make a special point of consulting with each National Spiritual Assembly on how this challenge can best be met through the instrumentality of goals based on the seven major objectives set forth in 1986, which still provide a valid framework for your planning, and to ensure that no essential element of your community's development is overlooked.

Each National Spiritual Assembly is to formulate specific goals towards the attainment of the objectives in light of the present conditions and opportunities in each country—goals that match the urgent needs and that can be achieved in the short space of three years. No doubt each country will require its specific emphasis among these objectives, and your consultations with the Counselors will be invaluable in assisting you to focus the endeavors of the friends in each of your communities.

For ease of reference, we repeat the objectives as originally stated:

1. Carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind
2. Greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society
3. A worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature
4. Further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities

5. Greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers
6. A wider extension of Bahá'í education to children and youth, and the strengthening of Bahá'í family life
7. The pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities.

As a further element in the responsibility conferred upon National Spiritual Assemblies for the formulation of goals, each National Assembly able to do so is encouraged, in addition to setting goals for its homefront, to propose to the World Center those goals and activities which it judges its community can undertake in assisting other national Bahá'í communities. These proposals for international collaboration goals will then be considered at the World Center before they are finally approved.

During the course of the Six Year Plan we have seen a notable evolution of the capacity of National Spiritual Assemblies as well as a marked increase in their number. The believers throughout the world have paid special attention to deepening their understanding of and loyalty to the Covenant, and they have now been blessed by the worldwide application of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

The Holy Year has already raised high the call of Bahá'u'lláh to mankind and has been a source of infinite bounty to those who are enlisted under His Banner. By its close, the World Congress will have been held and the English translation of the Most Holy Book will have been published to the community of the Most Great Name and to all the world.

It is yet too soon to evaluate the effect of these momentous events, but under the driving power of God's Great Plan the world is passing through a period of rapid change. The Bahá'í community alone knows clearly the direction that this is taking and it must now, as never before, demonstrate in its community life and the lives of its individual members the reality of the transformation that Bahá'u'lláh intends for all humankind. To achieve this we must know well His Teachings and put them into practice with ardor and conviction in every aspect of our behavior. It is our fervent prayer that the Three Year Plan will effect a transformation in the character of the worldwide Bahá'í community that will inspire admiration and emulation on every side and greatly increase the number of those who acclaim the coming and follow the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

We eagerly look forward to receiving a report of your goals as soon as you have set them down following consultation with the Counselors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

15 October 1992

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 3 September 1992 and is very glad that you have raised this matter. It has recently been disturbed at the degree to which these issues seem to have been giving concern to Bahá'ís in different parts of the world. It may, indeed, be providential for the matter to be brought to the fore now, before the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is published. We have been asked to convey to you the following comments.

As you know, the human soul is “a heavenly gem ... whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel,” “one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries.” If even the soul of man is so ineffable a reality, how can a human being claim to understand or to set forth the nature of the Manifestations of God, of the relationships between Them, or of Their relationship to God, let alone to grasp the nature of God Himself?

Bahá'u'lláh has explained these mysteries to a degree never before approached, but we must accept that they are realities that cannot be defined in a rigorous manner, as one would attempt to define the terms of mathematics or even of philosophy. This is a realm of knowledge in which poetry, analogy, hyperbole and paradox are to be expected; a realm in which the Manifestations Themselves speak with many voices. Undoubtedly you are familiar with the passage in the Kitáb-i-Íqán in which Bahá'u'lláh elaborates this theme, commenting on Muḥammad's statement: “Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others. To some God hath spoken, some He hath raised and exalted. And to Jesus, Son of Mary, We gave manifest signs, and We strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit.”

By virtue of this station, they have claimed for themselves the Voice of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of Messengership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God. In every instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the requirements of the occasion, and have ascribed all these declarations to Themselves, declarations ranging from the realm of divine Revelation to the realm of creation, and from the domain of Divinity even unto the domain of earthly existence. Thus it is that whatsoever be their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship or Servitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Therefore, these sayings which We have quoted in support of Our argument must be attentively considered, that the divergent utterances of the Manifestations of the Unseen and Daysprings of Holiness may cease to agitate the soul and perplex the mind.

The Bahá'ís must study the Kitáb-i-Íqán and the explanations given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and not be misled into thinking that any statement made in the Sacred Texts, in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, or in the letters of the Universal House of Justice is made in ignorance of these fundamental clarifications.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh again and again speaks with the Voice of God, a station that He affirms in this passage from the Súriy-i-Haykal:

Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen, the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God.... The Holy Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single letter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that comprehend.

At another time, as published in *Gleanings 50*, He wrote:

And whenever I chose to hold my peace and be still, lo, the voice of the Holy Ghost, standing on my right hand, aroused me, and the Supreme Spirit appeared before my face, and Gabriel overshadowed me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within my bosom, bidding me arise and break my silence. If your hearing be purged and your ears be attentive, ye will assuredly perceive that every limb of my body, nay all the atoms of my being, proclaim and bear witness to this call: "God, besides Whom is none other God, and He, Whose beauty is now manifest, is the reflection of His glory unto all that are in heaven and on earth."

In *Messages to America*, on p. 100, we find this illuminating statement:

It was in such dramatic circumstances, recalling the experience of Moses when face to face with the Burning Bush in the wilderness of Sinai, the successive visions of Zoroaster, the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Dove upon Christ in the Jordan, the cry of Gabriel heard by Muḥammad in the Cave of Hira, and the dream of the Báb, in which the blood of the Imam Ḥusayn touched and sanctified His lips, that Bahá'u'lláh, He "around Whom the Point of the Bayán hath revolved," and the Vehicle of the greatest Revelation the world has yet seen, received the first intimation of His sublime Mission, and that a ministry which, alike in its duration and fecundity, is unsurpassed in the religious history of mankind, was inaugurated. It was on that occasion that the "Most Great Spirit," as designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, revealed itself to Him, in the form of a "Maiden," and bade Him "lift up" His "voice between earth and heaven"—that same Spirit which, in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muḥammadan Dispensations, had been respectively symbolized by the "Sacred Fire," the "Burning Bush," the "Dove," and the "Angel Gabriel."

On a related subject, the following reply to a question from an individual believer was written on behalf of the Guardian 19 October 1947:

Bahá'u'lláh is not the Intermediary between other Manifestations and God. Each has His own relation to the Primal Source. But in the sense that Bahá'u'lláh is the greatest Manifestation to yet appear, the One Who consummates the Revelation of Moses, He was the One Moses conversed with in the Burning Bush. In other

words Bahá'u'lláh identifies the Glory of the Godhead on that occasion with Himself. No distinction can be made amongst the Prophets in the sense that They all proceed from one source, and are of one essence. But Their stations and functions in this world are different.

It was with the magnitude of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in mind that the Universal House of Justice referred to Him as "the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet." This is analogous to Bahá'u'lláh's own statement in relation to the Báb: "Behold how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets and His Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones." These are both allusions to that "distinction" which in no way contradicts the essential "unity" of the Manifestations of God, as referred to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.

You may be quite confident that no "new theology" is being created—such a development would be entirely impossible in the Bahá'í Faith. All that is happening is that, in the year of the Centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension, the Bahá'í world is proclaiming more clearly than ever before the greatness of the event of His appearance in this world, and what it really means to say that we are witnessing the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

It is likely that in dealing with such matters individual friends will go beyond what the teachings of the Faith justify, but such errors will in due course be rectified and should not be permitted to give rise to disputations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

28 October 1992

[To two individuals]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has considered the concerns expressed in your letter of 15 September 1992 regarding the manner of appealing to the youth and of involving them in Bahá'í activities, particularly with respect to the youth year of service, and we have been directed to convey the following.

The House of Justice sympathizes with your view that undue pressure should not be put on the youth to induce them to engage in activities of a youth year of service, and it certainly would not be in accord with the purposes of the Faith to require youth to abandon their academic training so as to teach or otherwise serve the Faith. Many factors bear on the various points you have raised; these must be understood by both youth and parents, and of course by members of Bahá'í institutions. For example, every Bahá'í, whether youth or adult, has spiritual duties and obligations in common; among these is the duty prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh to the individual to teach His Faith, a duty which He describes as the "most meritorious of all deeds" and in which He urges us to be "unrestrained as the wind." Even so, the youth must be knowledgeable of the emphasis which Bahá'u'lláh places on education and the acquisition of skills, and they should regard the pursuit of these objectives as a service to God.

Particular challenges must be met by the youth, parents, and the Bahá'í institutions in relation to their respective responsibilities. For instance:

1. The youth face the pressing obligation of completing their education so as to acquire a profession or trade while at the same time observing their other spiritual obligations and duties to God.
2. Parents have the responsibility of ensuring that their children are educated and, to the extent possible, must provide the material support for their academic or vocational training up through their youthful years; parents also continue during this period to offer them moral and practical guidance as befits their parental duties and with respect to the spiritual obligations which they share in common with their Bahá'í children.
3. The Bahá'í institutions have not only to administer the affairs of the community and protect its interests but also to stimulate and exhort the friends to fulfill their spiritual duties and obligations. These same institutions, while encouraging the friends to teach the Cause of God and to make sacrifices in so doing, also have the clear responsibility laid upon them by Bahá'u'lláh to promote education of the human race, both spiritual and academic.

So fundamental are these duties and obligations that to some degree all entities—youth, parents, Bahá'í institutions—share in them, acting in accordance with their respective functions and responsibilities. There is a sphere in which each must make independent judgments and take independent action. A youth must decide on what professional training to pursue and keep a balance between such pursuit and his spiritual obligations; the parents must assist the youth, through material support and moral guidance, to achieve his goal, and must also encourage the youth in the observance of his spiritual obligations; the institutions must promote the Cause of God, endeavor to stimulate action on the part of individual believers in the teaching and consolidation of the Faith, with the full realization that if such action is neglected there can be no hope for the peace of mankind and the future growth of civilization. The institutions cannot, therefore, fail to urge the friends to service and to call their attention to the critical



situation of the times and to point out the crucial importance of the action of the individual to the fortunes of the Faith and humanity as a whole.

Along with all these considerations is the factor of the special role which the youth, with their particular qualities of enthusiasm and idealism, play in the development of the Cause. This has been evident from the earliest days of the Faith and is indispensable to its ultimate triumph. A cursory review of Bahá'í history provides many examples of the heroic deeds of youth, and today's Bahá'í youth cannot help but be inspired by such heroism to also play their part in their own time before they become burdened with the cares of adult life.

In some circumstances, however much a youth may wish to respond to a call to Bahá'í service of a particular kind, he may not be able to do so because he may be in the midst of important academic training that cannot and should not be postponed, he may be dependent on parents who cannot afford to assist him materially both to take time out to engage in a year of service and to return to his academic pursuits later on, or there may be other obstacles. Then there are circumstances in which a youth may find that by postponing his academic training for a time, he is better able to determine exactly what to do with his life, if during this time he can make some useful contribution to the Faith or to society. There are numerous examples of such circumstances among Bahá'í youth who have found that by engaging in activities of the youth year of service, they were able not only to make valuable contributions to the teaching of the Faith or to development projects, but were also able to make up their minds about their life's work. There are also many youth who prefer to complete their education before offering special services to the Faith, and this is entirely in order.

The preeminent point drawn from your letter is the importance of balance in judgment and action. The members of the Bahá'í institutions cannot escape their duty to urge and stimulate the friends, adult and youth, to serve the Cause, especially in the field of teaching, and in this they are inevitably enthusiastic. Of course, individuals differ in their approach and may in some cases be injudicious in their speech; this is to be regretted and dealt with as instances arise. But those who hear such persons, however much they may be stimulated by them, do also have the individual obligation to make judgments based upon their understanding of the Teachings, of the particular challenge at the moment, and of their circumstances, and should make their decisions accordingly.

As important as it is for parents to exercise their moral authority in assisting the youth not to make unwise decisions, it is also incumbent on the parents as Bahá'ís to give due consideration to the significance of the spiritual impact of the Faith upon the youth and recognize that the youth must have some latitude to respond to the stirrings of their hearts and souls, since they, beginning at the age of 15, must assume serious spiritual obligations and duties and are themselves alone ultimately responsible to God for the progress of their own souls. The capacity for mature thinking on the part of youth differs from one to the other and according to age; some attain this ability earlier than others; for some it is delayed. Parents are generally in a position to judge these matters more acutely than others and must consider them in their attempts to guide the youth in their families, but the parents must strive to do so in such a way as not to stifle their children's sense of spiritual responsibility.

The House of Justice has written numerous letters to the youth which aim at guiding them to achieve a proper balance in their plans and activities. One of these, which was addressed to the Bahá'í youth in every land on 10 June 1966, may be of particular interest to you and is enclosed herewith.

With deep empathy for you as parents challenged with the onerous task of raising your children in a world beset with unprecedented problems and difficulties, the House of Justice assures you of its ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

23 November 1992

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh attending the second Bahá'í World Congress

Dearly loved Friends,

With eager hopes and thankful hearts, we acclaim the convocation in New York of the second Bahá'í World Congress on the occasion of the worldwide celebration of the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. That so wide a diversity of the human race as you represent has assembled at this commemorative event is in itself history-making and is, indeed, an impressive demonstration of the potency and potential of the Covenant as the instrument designed by the Lord of the Age for the unification and pacification of the nations and peoples of the earth. We rejoice with exceeding gladness, for your coming together in such variegated array is an affirmation of the efficacy of this sacred legacy—a fresh assurance that, despite recurrent trials and turmoil, its world-redeeming, world-revolutionizing purpose will ultimately be entirely realized.

Our emotions are deeply stirred as we reflect on the remarkable circumstances which heralded the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. Melancholy and hopeful images alternately flash upon our mental screen: the tragic May night a century ago of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Supreme Manifestation of God; the soul-crushing scenes of the grief-stricken many who converged on Bahjí to pay their respects to His memory; the atmosphere of abject desolation caused by the loss of One Who had been Father and incomparable Friend to all. But the setting of the Sun of Bahá gave rise to the appearance of the Orb of the Covenant. Thus the majestic Figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to impress itself indelibly upon the consciousness of the faithful, consoling their spirits and brightening their outlook, because in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the Covenant, the Kitáb-i-Ahd, this beloved Son was appointed His Successor and the Center of the Covenant. Thus was set in motion on the morrow of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension the divine process that will, during the course of the Bahá'í Dispensation, guarantee the fulfillment of His principal purpose for humankind, namely, the realization of its oneness.

The initial momentum of this process was to gather particular force in the West as the acts of the beloved Master dramatically revealed. It was during His epic journey to North America that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, recently released from imprisonment, impressed upon the early occidental believers the pivotal importance of the new Covenant; and it was in New York City that He chose to disclose to His disciples the special characteristics of that Covenant and His true station as its appointed Center. The occasion won for this leading city of the western hemisphere the surname, City of the Covenant. Where else, then, but this signally blessed metropolis could serve as the fitting venue for the commemoration which has so marvelously brought you together?

This Congress is the major occasion during the Holy Year for the evocation of a memory which enables us all to appreciate how, through the dynamic person and peerless office of the Center of the Covenant, the will of both the Abhá Beauty and His Herald has been translated into viable means for actualizing the unity of mankind and building a world civilization. Consider, for instance, how on the very night in May 1844 when He declared His prophetic mission, the Báb addressed a summons to the peoples of the West that they issue forth from their cities to teach the Cause of God. Has that summons not thoroughly been fused with the world-embracing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh, becoming a shining reality within the framework of the Administrative Order, the child of the Covenant—an Order which the Báb anticipated and extolled in His Writings? You have come to New York to reflect on such triumphant realities with due solemnity and spiritual joy.

How heartwarming and noteworthy that the proceedings of this momentous gathering will be enhanced by the presence of the three Hands of the Cause of God, tried and true upholders of the Covenant chosen by Shoghi Effendi under his authority as the Guardian of the Faith appointed in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! We can never forget that by their selfless adherence to duty during the period of their custodianship following the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi, the Hands of the Cause preserved the wholeness of the Community of Bahá, while at the same time guiding the members of that expanding community to the victorious conclusion of the Guardian's Ten Year Global Plan. Nor can we cease to appreciate their continuing, tireless services in the propagation and protection of our glorious Faith. We are particularly pleased that our representative to the Congress is one of these high-ranking officers, the consort and helpmate of our beloved Guardian who herself attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

It was Shoghi Effendi who called for the first World Congress which jubilantly marked the one hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His divine mission. With admirable resourcefulness the Hands of the Cause planned and executed it. That unforgettable occasion in London some three decades ago, coming at the end of the Ten Year Crusade, affirmed for the Bahá'ís themselves that the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had truly emerged as a world religion with a world community. Now at this moment, throughout the Bahá'í world, we are engaged in another centennial observance for the purpose not only of celebrating the unique history of the Covenant, but also of proclaiming abroad its aims and unifying power. The second World Congress now convened is the mainspring in the launching of worldwide commemorative activities which will promulgate the Covenant as the axis of unity for all humankind and broadcast its qualities for reforming human society. Moreover, through these activities and other extended measures, the community

at all levels—local, national, continental and international—will exert immense effort to spread across the planet the Name of the World Reformer, Bahá'u'lláh, that hearts may be attracted and minds illumined.

But we speak of a proclamation which has more to do with deeds than words; and in this regard, we must, everywhere in our world community, attain a new awareness of the urgency of the times and of our sacred duties toward the Promised One of All Ages. A special expectation is therefore invested in you who are attending this focal event in the City of the Covenant. For these four special days of commemoration, may you all strive as never before to appreciate more adequately the life-transforming character and unific spirit of the Covenant, and to immediately demonstrate this heightened appreciation in the spiritual attitude you show among yourselves. May you do this with the resolve that what you practice towards each other during these few days will henceforth be sustained in your relations with all others elsewhere. Such active resolution will endow the second World Congress with the radiant power to impress upon the public the incontrovertible fact that the Bahá'í Faith is a world religion worthy of its claims and, hence, of public recognition.

In a Tablet to the Bahá'ís in New York, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed a hope which it is propitious to recall on this opportune occasion: "I eagerly anticipate the day," He wrote, "when 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...." Surely, through the auspicious circumstances afforded by this Congress, you will attempt thus to gratify His Spirit in the Abhá Realm, so that from His retreats on high you may receive the benediction of His abiding good pleasure and strengthening grace.

In our supplications at His blessed Shrine we shall entreat Him graciously to secure and in abundance vouchsafe to the entire community of His dedicated lovers the favors and confirmations of the Lord of the Covenant.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

26 November 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

A full century has gone by since the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was established and set in motion. And we extend to the members of His community our loving greetings as they are assembled today at the World Congress in New York and at auxiliary conferences on all continents, or as they otherwise participate in the observance of this centennial occasion.

We are particularly pleased that we have been afforded a special opportunity to pause for a moment, together with our fellow-believers, to gather our thoughts, to see how we have fared since 1892, and to consider where we are now headed. This enables us to engage in a symbolic act which by its very nature exemplifies the purpose of the Covenant—a Covenant intended by its divine Author to unite the races and nations of the earth.

Sublime emotions surge in our hearts as we survey the dramatic history and amazing progress of these one hundred years. At the time of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í community was contained within the borders of no more than fifteen countries, the vast majority of its members living in His native Iran. The community now embraces the entire planet. We rejoice at the spirit of unity which is evident in its steady consolidation through the workings of the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. Our cumulated experience has clearly demonstrated the efficacy of the Covenant. The genuine unity it induces greatly encourages our expectation that all of humanity can and will be united.

We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion. Indeed, the world in its current condition has lost its bearings through the operation of forces it neither understands nor can control. It is a period in which great dynasties and empires have collapsed in rapid succession, in which powerful ideologies have captured the hearts of millions only to expire in infamy, in which two world wars wreaked havoc on civilized life as it was known at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighborhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are

convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear.

Collateral with these changes has been the breakdown of institutions, religious and political, which traditionally functioned as the guideposts for the stability of society. Even the most resilient of these seem to be losing their credibility as they have become preoccupied with their own internal disorder. This calls attention to the emptiness of the moral landscape and the feeling of futility deranging personal life. Thoughtful commentators write apprehensively about the fall of culture and the consequent disappearance of values, the loss of the fullness of the inner life, a technological civilization facing an increasingly serious crisis. They write, moreover, of the human species as being at the end with its wisdom and being unable to control itself, of the need for divine wisdom and foresight, and of the human psyche as being far removed from recognizing this need.

These ominous comments reflect the universal consequences of a failed understanding as to the purpose of God for humankind. It is in this particular respect that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh sheds new light; it refreshes our thoughts; it clarifies and expands our conceptions. His Teachings imbue us with the abundance of God's love for His creatures; they impress upon us the indispensability of justice in human relations and emphasize the importance of adhering to principle in all matters; they inform us that human beings have been created "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization" and that the virtues that befit the dignity of every person are: "forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth."

As the members of our community have pursued their plan for teaching His Faith, they have grown to appreciate more adequately the purpose of the multifarious processes of change which have been at work during the course of the century. "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, are," our Teachings tell us, "but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life. It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert. "Should the lamp of religion be obscured," Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine."

In an elaboration of these dreadful consequences, our Teachings state that "when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts ... a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most

revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished.”

Such, unfortunately, is the state to which institutions and individuals have come in our time. Against this background the requirements of the Covenant assume even more critical importance than before. There can be no doubt that if our community is to cope with the situation, it must advance rapidly towards the next phase in its evolution. It will be a phase in which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must of necessity anticipate a deep encounter with the forces operating with such bewildering ferocity throughout the world. Let us, therefore, take this propitious occasion to review the covenantal arrangement which generates and sustains our actions.

The foundation of our belief rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God, the Unknowable Essence, the Supreme Creator, and on our submission to His will as revealed for this age by Bahá'u'lláh. To accept the Messenger of God in His Day and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfill. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, and by so doing performs an act which may be regarded as the highest expression of free will with which every human being is endowed by an all-loving Creator. The vehicle in this resplendent age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. It is the instrument by which belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds.

The oneness of humankind is the pivotal principle and ultimate goal of His mission. This principle means far more than the reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among people: “It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.”<sup>42</sup> The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh embodies the spirit, instrumentality and method to attain this essential goal. In addition to laying down, in His Book of Laws, the fundamentals for a new World Order, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, confirmed the appointment of His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the interpreter of His Word and the Center of His Covenant. As the interpreter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the living mouth of the Book, the expounder of the Word; as the Center of the Covenant, He became the incorruptible medium for applying the Word to practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization. The Covenant is, therefore, unique as a divine phenomenon, in that Bahá'u'lláh, further to conferring upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá the necessary authority to fulfill the requirements of His singular office, vested in Him the virtues of perfection in personal and social behavior, that humanity may have an enduring model to emulate. In no annals of the past is there recorded such an arrangement for ensuring the realization of the purpose of the Manifestation of God.

This Covenant is the guarantee against schism; that is why those who occasionally attempt to create a cleavage in the community utterly fail in the long run. Similarly, the incessant persecution the community has been forced to endure for more than a century in the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth has not succeeded in destroying its identity or undermining its organic unity. The glorious, ultimate effect of this arrangement

will be to ensure the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, as promised in the Holy Books of old and as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

"The Day of the Promise is come," He clearly announces, "and He Who is the Promised One loudly proclaimeth before all who are in heaven and all who are on earth: 'Verily there is none other God but He, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting!' I swear by God! That which had been enshrined from eternity in the knowledge of God, the Knower of the seen and unseen, is revealed. Happy is the eye that seeth, and the face that turneth towards, the Countenance of God, the Lord of all being."

Indeed, the coming of Bahá'u'lláh ushered the world into a new age, making possible the beginning of a wholly new relationship between humanity and its Supreme Creator. The characteristics of this relationship are summed up in the Covenant inaugurated upon His passing a century ago. Its spiritual dynamic and cohesive power, its unifying principles and practical institutional provisions are a pattern for the healing of the ills afflicting our fractured societies and defective social systems. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh gives new meaning to humanity's checkered history; it imparts a fresh impulse to human striving. "Like unto the artery," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, it "beats and pulsates in the body of the world." The pervasive influence it exerts is at the heart of the derangement of human affairs; it drives the accelerating transition from the old order to the new World Order envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. "Soon," He writes, "will the present day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." And He explains: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System, the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."

Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give due attention to the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them realize that the storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems. Let us, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, redouble our effort in the exercise of our sacred duty to acquaint all humanity with the animating purpose of the worldwide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them discover that, "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world." Let us, with patience and humility, respond to challenging or skeptical questions while unfolding the purposes of this Law. Let them know that it "can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided."

Let us by word and example show that "it does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world." Finally, let them appreciate that "it calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race"; that "it insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world"; that "it repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other"; that "its watchword is unity in diversity."



It is especially noteworthy that coincidental with this Bahá'í Holy Year are the commemorations of other world-shaking occurrences which, centuries ago, commenced processes destined to attain their glorious consummation in the Promised Day of God. The ultimate resolution of the profound issues to which they gave rise, and which have ripened with the passage of time, is discernible in the eventual realization of the world-embracing System of Bahá'u'lláh.

Our thoughts turn to the history of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epic journey to the West and particularly to North America where, in New York, He disclosed to His western disciples the implications of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. It was, in a sense, an act of renewal, prospective of the consolidation of the union of the Old and New Worlds into one global entity. Surnamed by Him "City of the Covenant," New York resonates with the effects of that experience of eighty years ago. Then it was still the major entryway to the "Land of Promise" for millions of people seeking new horizons. Now it is recognized as a gathering place for the leaders of nations, an international venue for efforts at achieving unity in the political realm. Its very atmosphere vibrates with the hopes of a world seeking to set its affairs in order. Today, the hearts of the Bahá'ís throughout the earth are focused on this City of the Covenant wherein many thousands of their fellow-believers, from all parts of the planet, have assembled in the second Bahá'í World Congress. The presence there of such a widely varied representation of the human race is an affirmation of the unific power of the Covenant which the event was convened to celebrate.

In this season of beginnings and of the commemorations of beginnings, we Bahá'ís set for ourselves a new measure of effort, one more daring and persistent than before. May our words proclaim, and our deeds demonstrate, that there is only one God, only one religion, only one race. And few though we be, may we thus fulfill our duty towards Bahá'u'lláh, towards His Covenant, and, indeed, towards all humankind.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

24 January 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Further to our letter of 14 November 1991, the Universal House of Justice has now completed its consideration of your letter of 21 September 1991, in which you raised a number of questions pertaining to violence and to the sexual abuse of women and children. We have been instructed to provide the following response to your questions.

As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remold all dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved....

The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned." Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behavior by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their

obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

Consultation has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed, in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse is present.

A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes which is set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings. This principle is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes marriage to the woman is altered by the Bahá'í Teachings to permit the woman to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, "The Guardian wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction or preference is permitted...." With the passage of time, during which Bahá'í men and women endeavor to apply more fully the principle of the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reaching ramifications of this vital principle. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."

The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encouragement be given to Bahá'í women and girls to participate in greater measure in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities, and has appealed to Bahá'í women to arise and demonstrate the importance of their role in all fields of service to the Faith.

For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.

Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if

agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself has come the following statement on the subject of the treatment of women:

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The lack of spiritual values in society leads to a debasement of the attitudes which should govern the relationship between the sexes, with women being treated as no more than objects for sexual gratification and being denied the respect and courtesy to which all human beings are entitled. Bahá'u'lláh has warned: "They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost." Believers might well ponder the exalted standard of conduct to which they are encouraged to aspire in the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning His "true follower," that: "And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful."

One of the most heinous of sexual offenses is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá'í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá'í Teachings. If she gives birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion whether to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from the father; however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá'í law, be called into question, in view of the circumstances.

The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf, that "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse," and that "The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established." In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual consideration and respect should apply. If a Bahá'í woman suffers abuse or is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to the Spiritual Assembly for assistance and counsel, or to seek legal protection. Such abuse would gravely jeopardize the continuation of the marriage, and could well lead to a condition of irreconcilable antipathy.

You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is clear from the Bahá'í Writings that a vital component of the education of children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom....

While the physical discipline of children is an acceptable part of their education and training, such actions are to be carried out "gently and patiently" and with "loving care," far removed from the anger and violence with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights, and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a Bahá'í community.

It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human conduct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form in incest. At a time in the fortunes of humanity when, in the words of the Guardian, "The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves ... in their worst and most revolting aspects," and when "the voice of human conscience is stilled," when "the sense of decency and shame is obscured," the Bahá'í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their care, and must not allow either threats or appeals to expediency to divert them from their duty. A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such grossly immoral behavior, and to promote healing and therapy.

Bahá'u'lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse.

As humanity passes through the age of transition in its evolution to a world civilization which will be illuminated by spiritual values and will be distinguished by its justice and its unity, the role of the Bahá'í community is clear: it must accomplish a spiritual transformation of its members, and must offer to the world a model of the society destined to come into being through the power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Membership in the Bahá'í community is open to all who accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God, and who thereupon embark on the process of changing their conduct and refining their character. It is inevitable that this community will, at times, be subject to delinquent behavior of members whose actions do not conform to the standards of the Teachings. At such times, the institutions of the Faith will not hesitate to apply Bahá'í law with justice and fairness in full confidence that this Divine Law is the means for the true happiness of all concerned.

However, it should be recognized that the ultimate solution to the problems of humanity lies not in penalties and punishments, but rather in spiritual education and illumination. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

It is incumbent upon human society to expend all its forces on the education of the people, and to copiously water men's hearts with the sacred streams that pour down from the Realm of the All-Merciful, and to teach them the manners of Heaven and spiritual ways of life, until every member of the community of man will be schooled, refined, and exalted to such a degree of perfection that the very committing of a shameful act will seem in itself the direst infliction and most agonizing of punishments, and man will fly in terror and seek refuge in his God from the very idea of crime, as something far harsher and more grievous than the punishment assigned to it.

It is toward this goal that the community of the Greatest Name is striving, aided and reinforced by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

5 March 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas—the Book described in such exalted terms by the Guardian of the Cause of God as “that priceless treasury enshrining for all time the brightest emanations of the mind of Bahá'u'lláh, the Charter of His World Order, the chief repository of His laws, the Harbinger of His Covenant, the Pivotal Work containing some of His noblest exhortations, weightiest pronouncements, and portentous prophecies, and revealed during the full tide of His tribulations, at a time when the rulers of the earth had definitely

forsaken Him”—this Most Holy Book, we have the honor to announce, will, in a copiously annotated English translation, be released to the Community of Bahá at Naw-Rúz.

Bahá'u'lláh's own designations of the Book—the “Unerring Balance,” the “Straight Path,” the “quickener of mankind,” the “source of true felicity”—indicate its phenomenal importance, an importance which staggers the mind when viewed in light of the realization that this Book is, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the “principal repository of that Law which the Prophet Isaiah had anticipated, and which the writer of the Apocalypse had described as the ‘new heaven’ and the ‘new earth,’ as ‘the Tabernacle of God,’ as the ‘Holy City,’ as the ‘Bride,’ the ‘New Jerusalem coming down from God.’” Such metaphors of hope have been recited from sacred scriptures down the ages, have fired the imagination and excited the expectations of unnumbered generations, and now, at long last, in this new Dispensation, have been given tangible form by the Promised One of All Ages in this Mother Book of His Revelation.

The publication of the Book in English satisfies a major goal of the Six Year Plan. But even beyond this, it initiates the fulfillment of a prospect voiced by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who anticipated its publication in various languages; it realizes an intention cherished by Shoghi Effendi, who had himself translated substantial portions of it into English which he diffused through his letters and in his compilations of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, and who had also, “as an essential prelude to the eventual translation and publication of its entire text,” initiated steps in 1955 for the preparation of a Synopsis and Codification of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This was a task on which he made considerable progress and which was completed by the Universal House of Justice in 1973, on the hundredth anniversary of the revelation of the Book which occurred, as Shoghi Effendi confirmed, “soon after Bahá'u'lláh had been transferred to the house of ‘Údí Khammár (circa 1873), at a time when He was still encompassed by the tribulations that had afflicted Him, through the acts committed by His enemies and the professed adherents of His Faith.”

The accessibility to Western readers of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in full authorized text, for the first time in one of their major languages, enormously extends the sphere of its influence, opening wider the door to a vast process of individual and community development which must certainly exert an increasingly powerful, transformative effect on peoples and nations as the Book is translated further into other languages. That the English edition of this highly treasured and incalculably potent work should appear now amid the welter of a world at odds with itself is a demonstration of confidence in the ultimate emergence of a peaceful, civilized, global society. That it should be published during the period of the centenary of both the Ascension of its divine Author and the inauguration of His Covenant amplifies the striking impact, already felt, of the Holy Year which marks so important an anniversary.

A Book of such indescribable holiness is itself a symbol of the incomparable greatness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and is, indeed, a potent reminder of the high respect which is due to all that has flowed from His prodigious, truth-bearing pen. May the friends of God ever be mindful of its exalted rank among the sacred texts of the Faith; treasure it as the bread of life; regard possession of it as a sacred honor, as a priceless legacy from the Pen of the Most High, as a source of God's greatest bounty to His creatures; place their whole trust in its provisions; recite its verses; study its contents; adhere to its exhortations; and thus transform their lives in accordance with the divine standard.

Let us rejoice. Let us be filled with the felicitous spirit evoked in the Blessed Beauty's own announcement of the Mother Book of His Dispensation when He said: "We announce unto everyone the joyful tidings concerning that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book—a Book from above whose horizon the day-star of My commandments shineth upon every observer and every observed one." May we be such upholders of its laws and principles as to deserve His gloriously promised benediction: "Blessed those who peruse it. Blessed those who apprehend it. Blessed those who meditate upon it. Blessed those who ponder its meaning. So vast is its range that it hath encompassed all men ere their recognition of it. Ere long will its sovereign power, its pervasive influence and the greatness of its might be manifested on earth. Verily, thy God is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed."

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



## **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 marvelous 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 overarching 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 Honor at the entrance 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 program; 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 Center 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 center 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 Riḍván, 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 Center 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 an 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 endeavors 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 behavior 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 Counselors, chart the course to be followed in this brief span, the World Center will attend to coordinating widely diverse activities throughout 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 Center 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 savor 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## The Universal House of Justice

24 June 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Following fast upon the inspiring events of the seventh International Bahá'í Convention and the subsequent Counselors' Conference, the opening weeks of the Three Year Plan have been marked with yet another highly significant event. On the morning of Saturday 5 June, the Hands of the Cause of God 'Alí Akbar Furútan and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, with all nine Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre, joined the members of the Universal House of Justice in Bahjí and proceeded to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh for prayer as the initial act of the newly appointed Teaching Center. All then held a first meeting in the room used by Shoghi Effendi in the Mansion of Bahjí, recalling the many historic associations of that blessed spot.

Joint consultations continued on the afternoon of that same day in the Council Chamber of the Universal House of Justice, exploring the tasks now facing the International Teaching Centre as the world advances through the climacteric years at the close of the twentieth century.

During the five years since May 1988, when far-reaching decisions were made on the functioning of the International Teaching Centre and, for the first time, the number of its Counselor members was raised to nine, that institution has abundantly demonstrated its capacity and eagerness to assume the wide range of responsibilities conferred upon it.

The clarification of various approaches to the teaching work which the Teaching Center has issued, its indication of potentially fruitful methods and fields of endeavor, and the collaboration of the Counselors with the National Spiritual Assemblies in the formulation of their goals for the Three Year Plan have contributed immeasurably to the deepening of the understanding of the individual believers; the teaching, enrollment and inspiring of children and youth; the consolidation of growing communities; the strengthening of their institutions; and unflagging pursuit of the expansion of the Cause.

The Teaching Center's former duties relating to the formulation of plans for our approval have undergone a change as a result of the devolution of planning upon National Spiritual Assemblies which was a mark of the opening of the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age. We have been most favorably impressed by the guidance it has given to the Continental Counselors to promote consultation at the local and national levels, among institutions and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth in the Bahá'í community, and we look forward to the perpetuation and expansion of this collaboration.

The responsibility of the Continental Boards of Counselors to protect the Faith, under the guidance of the International Teaching Centre, will undoubtedly gain greater importance in the years ahead. They will encourage and assist the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, not only to deal with questions on the Faith raised by interested non-Bahá'ís, but also to counter attacks launched by external opponents.

Study of the Faith itself is a vital element in the soundness of the growth of Bahá'í communities, their consolidation and their protection. This should include systematic study of the Writings of the Faith, its history, its relationship to various systems of thought, and the application of its Teachings to the spiritual and material life of society. The International Teaching Centre will contribute significantly to the advancement of such study.

In the production and dissemination of Bahá'í literature, which is fundamental to both the expansion and consolidation of the Cause, the support given by the Counselors to National Assemblies through the Literature Subvention Fund and especially the Teaching Center's promotion of the core literature concept have resulted in an admirable surge forward, and we are confident that this effort will be augmented in the years ahead.

The flow of pioneers and traveling teachers has been notably increased through the development of the Continental Pioneer Committees under the aegis of the International Teaching Centre, as well as by the actions of the Continental Counselors and National Assemblies. It has become apparent that, with the growth of the Bahá'í world and the increased mobility of the friends, new methods are required for advising and routing pioneers. The pioneering call for the Three Year Plan therefore assumes a character different from that to which the friends have been accustomed and will, we confidently expect, permit a far more fruitful use of the energies and devotion of the friends.

All the above matters were among the subjects of consultation between the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre at their meetings on 5 June, and during a subsequent meeting towards the close of the intensive consultations carried on by the Teaching Center itself. The five members who are still resident abroad are now preparing to move to the Holy Land.

It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these developments will impart a yet greater impetus to the activities of the individual believers and their institutions throughout the world and accelerate the work already so eagerly launched for the achievement of the Three Year Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

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It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these developments will impart a yet greater impetus to the activities of the individual believers and their institutions throughout the world and accelerate the work already so eagerly launched for the achievement of the Three Year Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

30 June 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received on ... your letter concerning the teaching activities in ... , and we have been asked to convey the following response to you. We regret the length of time which has elapsed since the writing of your letter; our reply has been delayed by the pressure of work at the Bahá'í World Centre over the past few months.

It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching which apply pressure to people to declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh, or which register as believers those who apparently have no real knowledge of the Faith or its Message. It troubles you that such methods of teaching seem to be sanctioned by the institutions of the Faith in . . . and that your remonstrances have met with no satisfying response from those institutions.

The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, enthusiasm, purity of intention and eloquence of speech. Like other human beings, Bahá'ís tend to go to extremes, and too few people bring the proper balance to the way they act. This is particularly true in the teaching of the Faith. At one extreme are those who are so on fire with love for the Faith and with awareness of the desperate need of the people for its healing message, that they overstep the bounds of wisdom and discretion and stray into the area of proselytizing. At the other extreme are those who are so gentle in their approach and so concerned never to arouse an adverse reaction that they fail to convey the enormous importance of the Cause or to convince their hearers; for if the messenger is not enthusiastic, how can he convey enthusiasm to others? The first extreme leads to misrepresentation of the teachings and causes disillusionment; the second results in the stagnation of the community and its failure to fulfill its fundamental duty of conveying this life-giving message to the world.

In this, as in all aspects of the work of the Cause, the solution lies in the friends being patient and forbearing towards those whose shortcomings distress them, and in endeavoring, through the Assemblies' consultation, to draw closer to a proper balance while maintaining the momentum of the work and canalizing the enthusiasm of the believers.

In one of its messages, published on page 32 of *Wellspring of Guidance*, the Universal House of Justice gave the following advice:

Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles

of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

In the western world in recent decades, Bahá'ís have grown used to thinking that the process by which a person accepts the Faith takes a long time, and that it is unthinkable for someone to intelligently accept Bahá'u'lláh within minutes of hearing of Him. This may be the pattern to which they have become accustomed, but it is far from being a universal one. When people accepted the Faith quickly in Africa and other parts of the Third World, western Bahá'ís sometimes explained it away by saying that such people were less educated and had fewer ideas to work their way through. Now the same process is happening in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, and highly educated people are accepting the Faith as soon as they hear of it, embracing it enthusiastically, and rapidly deepening their understanding of its teachings by reading every Bahá'í book they can lay their hands on. So it is clear that receptivity to spiritual truth is, as Bahá'u'lláh indicated, a matter of purity of heart, not of education or lack of it.

In the west of Europe, too, there are signs of greater receptivity towards the Faith among the people, and some are ready to join the community of the Most Great Name if approached in the proper manner. In such cases when an individual hears the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and is moved to declare his faith, there should be no obstacle placed in his way. Great care must be taken that when the heart of the individual is touched by the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Message and the declarant has expressed his desire to embrace the Faith, the process of deepening be followed almost immediately. Deepening the knowledge of the new believer in the verities of the Faith is the most vital part of teaching; but deepening is not merely the imparting of knowledge—it requires also to imbue the soul of the person with the love of Bahá'u'lláh so that his faith may grow day by day and he becomes a steadfast believer.

In the following statement, Shoghi Effendi advises the Bahá'í teacher to advance the process of deepening for a person who is attracted to the Faith:

Let him [the Bahá'í teacher] consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it. Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations of its interests, and the coordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be

content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.

(The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 51–52)

From these words of the Guardian we can see that wisdom, encouragement, persuasion, and patience, are all called for, and that these must be attuned to the response shown by the hearer. We also see that the process of deepening continues long after the new believer has enrolled in the Bahá'í community...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

1 July 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice was touched to receive your letter of 11 June 1993 which evinces such devotion to the Cause of God. It has asked us to send you the following reply.

The House of Justice has never gone to the extreme of telling the friends that now is the time to give their long-range savings to the Fund. It sets forth the needs of the Cause, and calls upon the believers to sacrifice, but the degree and manner of his sacrifice depends on each believer's own faith and good judgment in light of his responsibilities. Again and again in His Writings Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the need for moderation in all things, and He upholds the importance of using wisdom in all we do and say.

Devoted believers in every age have found it challenging to decide how much of their worldly wealth they should give to the Cause of God, and how much they should use to meet their many responsibilities of life, such as educating their children, preparing for their old age so that they will not be a burden on others, and so forth. You will recall the story of the Muslim who asked Muḥammad whether he should tie up his camel or trust in God that it would not run away. Muḥammad's answer was that he should tie up the camel *and* trust in God! In this Dispensation, by the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh has provided us with a measure. We are all obliged to pay that portion of our savings that is God's Right. What remains thereafter is ours to use at our own discretion, for the promotion of the work of the Cause and for helping others less fortunate than ourselves.

In the Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh revealed:

O My Servant! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

Furthermore, in the twelfth Glad-Tidings He stated:

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.

Thus to earn a livelihood is a spiritual obligation, and one should not consciously place oneself in a position where one would have to beg others for material support.

It is against this background of responsibility for oneself and one's family that each person must estimate the degree to which he or she can sacrifice for the Funds of the Faith. The range of options and decisions that the believers can make regarding the management of their personal finances without jeopardizing their future security are great, and can only be evaluated by each individual.

The House of Justice asks us to assure you of its prayers at the Sacred Threshold that you may be assisted with divine guidance and confirmations in all your devoted services on behalf of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

4 July 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

... conveyed to the Universal House of Justice the inquiries contained in your letter to him dated 14 June 1993, and we have been instructed to send the following response.

The reason that the term "the Bahá'ís in the West" was left unchanged in the letter of 9 June 1974 addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iceland when it was circulated to all National Spiritual Assemblies on 9 May 1993, is that it is a term the significance of which is generally understood by the friends, while to elucidate it exactly would have raised unnecessary complications in such a context.

As you are aware, many of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas were applied in Iran and the neighboring lands of the Middle East from very early days, and others were progressively enforced by Shoghi Effendi. He used to comment to pilgrims that he was raising the pillar of the administration of the Cause in the West and the pillar of the laws in the East.

As the Faith spread in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, certain laws were applied there also, but fewer than were already current in Iran. The Faith continued to spread around the world, and the terms “east” and “west” in this context acquired specialized meanings. While the “east” continued to designate Iran, Iraq and other countries of the older Bahá’í communities of the Middle East, the term “west” came to include the rest of the world. Thus, Persian pilgrims in the time of Shoghi Effendi would stay in the “Eastern” Pilgrim House, while Australian and Chinese pilgrims would stay in the “Western” Pilgrim House.

To pioneer for the Faith and for many other reasons, believers from Iran began to move to other parts of the world. This mere change in residence was no reason for them to cease to observe those laws of the Aqdas with which they were familiar, but they had to learn not to impose them on the “western” Bahá’ís. With intermarriage between “eastern” and “western” Bahá’ís other variations arose, depending upon whether the children were raised in a western or eastern family environment.

In light of this explanation the individual believers now residing in the “west” must decide in light of their own situations which of the laws are binding upon them. The letter to the National Assembly of Iceland clearly lists those laws which are currently *not* binding on the “western” friends. The fact that they are not binding does not, of course, mean that the believers are forbidden to obey them if they wish to and circumstances permit. Bahá’ís from Iran who have migrated to the west should already know which laws are binding upon them, having learned this in their homeland. Bahá’ís of Iranian or mixed descent living in the west, whose parents have not familiarized them with the laws, should at least follow those laws which are universally binding.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

2 September 1993

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

... As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities will be initiated and administered by the Bahá’í institutions. Others will fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a private business venture

undertaken by an individual or group, the institutions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with their daily affairs. Only if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly intervene. Bahá'í institutions, of course, applaud any effort by these private ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would do well to offer them guidance, as requested or as circumstances require, and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause.

The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of nonprofit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá'í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá'í moral and ethical principles.

A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated to social and economic development is whether they are "Bahá'í" or not. Such a question cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no." Clearly, the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá'í institutions. In that sense they are not "Bahá'í" enterprises. In another sense, to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá'ís and strive to apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed be regarded as "Bahá'í." In referring to these organizations, we must avoid giving the impression that participating in their projects does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are "Bahá'í" in nature....

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

19 October 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... inquiring about the term "Bahá'í scholarship." It regrets the delay in responding to you, and has asked us to provide the following response.

The House of Justice suggests that the issues raised in your letter might best be considered in light of the statements in the Bahá'í Writings which disclose the relationship between the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and the knowledge which is acquired as a result of scholarly endeavors. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that:

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth....

It is evident that the Bahá'í Writings illuminate all areas of human endeavor and all academic disciplines. Those who have been privileged to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh have the bounty of access to a Revelation which casts light upon all aspects of thought and inquiry, and are enjoined to use the understanding which they obtain from their immersion in the Holy Writings to advance the interests of the Faith.

Those believers with the capacity and opportunity to do so have repeatedly been encouraged in their pursuit of academic studies by which they are not only equipped to render much-needed services to the Faith, but are also provided with the means to acquire a profound insight into the meaning and the implications of the Bahá'í Teachings. They discover also that the perceptions gained from a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh clarify the subjects of their academic inquiry.

It is useful to review a number of statements written by Shoghi Effendi on this subject. To a believer who had completed advanced academic studies in a subject related to the Teachings the Guardian stated, in a letter written on his behalf:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

When he was informed of the enrollment of a scientist in the Faith, the response set out in the letter written on his behalf was:

We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers are linked to deep faith a tremendous teaching potential is created....

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured. They are urged to be modest about their accomplishments, and to bear in mind always the statement of Bahá'u'lláh that:

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge.

At this early stage in the development of the Faith, it would not be useful to propound a highly restrictive definition of the term "Bahá'í scholarship." In a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an Association for Bahá'í Studies recently, it is stated that:

The House of Justice advises you not to attempt to define too narrowly the form that Bahá'í scholarship should take, or the approach that scholars should adopt. Rather should you strive to develop within your Association respect for a wide range of approaches and endeavors. No doubt there will be some Bahá'ís who will wish to work in isolation, while others will desire consultation and collaboration with those having similar interests. Your aim should be to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance within which will be included scholars whose principal interest is in theological issues as well as those scholars whose interests lie in relating the insights provided by the Bahá'í teachings to contemporary thought in the arts and sciences.

A similar diversity should characterize the endeavors pursued by Bahá'í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as the needs of the Faith. The course of world events, the development of new trends of thought and the extension of the teaching work all tend to highlight attractive and beneficial areas to which Bahá'í scholars might well direct their attention. Likewise, the expansion of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community in its relationship with United Nations agencies and other international bodies creates attractive opportunities for scholars to make a direct and highly valued contribution to the enhancement of the prestige of the Faith and to its proclamation within an influential and receptive stratum of society. As the Bahá'í community continues to emerge inexorably from obscurity, it will be confronted by enemies, from both within and without, whose aim will be to malign and misrepresent its principles, so that its admirers might be disillusioned and the faith of its adherents might be shaken; Bahá'í scholars have a vital role to play in the defense of the Faith through their contribution to anticipatory measures and their response to defamatory accusations leveled against the Faith.



Thus, there should be room within the scope of Bahá'í scholarship to accommodate not only those who are interested in theological issues and in the historical origins of the Faith, but also those who are interested in relating the Bahá'í Teachings to their field of academic or professional interest, as well as those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired insights which are of interest to others.

Since you have raised the question of whether physics is more than tangentially related to Bahá'í issues, you might consider the following comments of a well-known scientific thinker, who is not a Bahá'í, about the correlation between the Bahá'í Teachings and recent developments in the physical sciences:

In our times we can only survive, and our civilization can only flower, if we reorient the conventional wisdom and achieve the new insights which have been proclaimed by the Bahá'í Faith and which are now also supported by the latest discoveries of the empirical sciences.

Bahá'ís proclaim that the most important condition that can bring about peace is unity—the unity of families, of nations, and of the great currents of thought and inquiry that we denote science and religion. Maturity, in turn, is a prerequisite for such unity. This is evolutionary thinking, and its validity is shown by the new theories which emerge from nonequilibrium thermodynamics, dynamical systems theory, cybernetics, and the related sciences of complexity. They are supported by detailed empirical investigations in such fields as physical cosmology, paleobiological macroevolutionary theory, and new trends in historiography.

The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavor by a Bahá'í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

4 January 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As construction work commences on the first of the monumental Edifices which must be raised on Mount Carmel to complete the World Administrative Center of the Bahá'í Faith, it seems appropriate to review the significance of this vast project and to reflect on its basic purpose.

The projects under way on this mountain are of profound significance. They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the expanding needs of the Bahá'í World Centre. The call for contributions to the Arc Projects Fund, far from being a diversion of resources which might otherwise be used to help relieve the distress of mankind, offers the followers of Bahá'u'lláh a providential opportunity to participate in an endeavor which is central to the work of the Faith in eradicating the causes of the appalling suffering now afflicting humanity.

The Bahá'í community encourages and supports the manifold efforts being made by people of goodwill to better the condition of humankind and promote unity and harmony among the peoples and nations of the earth. However, the believers should never, for even one moment, lose sight of the fact that the crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially spiritual. "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world," Bahá'u'lláh emphatically states, "is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith." Our acute awareness of the magnitude of the misery which so many groups and individuals are experiencing should spur us on to ever-greater exertions, inspired and animated by an abiding consciousness that only through the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can the multitudinous problems burdening humanity be resolved.

From the dawn of Bahá'í history, attention has been directed to the glory of the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to unfold. The Báb Himself declared, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord!" while Bahá'u'lláh affirmed, in the Mother Book of His Dispensation, that "the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order." It is abundantly evident that the exalted aims of the Faith can be accomplished only through the instrumentality of the World Order which Bahá'u'lláh has established for that purpose. The spiritual transformation of humanity, the relief of the diverse peoples of the earth from rampant suffering, the attainment and preservation of true peace in the world, the birth of a world civilization—all such noble objectives of the Cause of God will remain unrealized unless they are associated with that radical change in the structure and functioning of human society inherent in the growth and fruition of His divinely ordained Order. The institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, now being raised in all parts of the world through the endeavors of the believers, are the precursor, the nucleus and the pattern of that World Order which will, in the course of time, exert its full benevolent influence on all the peoples of the earth.

Shoghi Effendi explained that the revelation by Bahá'u'lláh of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest." And he referred to "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 Center 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 Center and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá'í world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order." These three processes, although distinct, are closely interrelated. Developments at the World Center of the Faith, the heart and nerve-center of the Administrative Order, must necessarily exert a pronounced influence on the organic body of the worldwide Bahá'í community, and be affected by its vitality. The Administrative Order may best be viewed as the chief instrument for the prosecution of the Divine Plan, while that Plan has become recognized as the most potent agency for the development of the administrative structure of the Faith. It follows that, for the sound and balanced growth of the Faith and the speedy attainment of world order, due attention must be paid to all three processes.

The construction work now in progress on Mount Carmel should be seen as a major historic thrust in the development of the first of these three mighty processes—a process which was launched more than one hundred years ago by Bahá'u'lláh Himself when He pitched His tent on this Holy Mountain and revealed the Tablet described by the Guardian as "the Charter of the World Spiritual and Administrative Centers of the Faith." The unfoldment of this process has been distinguished by the interment of the sacred remains of the Báb in the bosom of this mountain within a sanctuary built by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, followed subsequently by the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb by Shoghi Effendi. When, in 1939, the Guardian transferred the bodily remains of the brother and mother of the Master to their final resting-place in the immediate vicinity of that of the Greatest Holy Leaf, he described his action as one which "incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the wings of the Báb's overshadowing Sepulcher," is designated to be the "focal center of these world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions" which the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are raising for the salvation of humanity and the fulfillment of its glorious destiny.

Shortly before his passing, the Guardian completed the structure of the International Bahá'í Archives, "the first stately Edifice destined to usher in the establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on Mount Carmel—the Ark referred to by Bahá'u'lláh in the closing passages of His Tablet of Carmel."

In more recent years the contributions of the believers around the world permitted construction of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the second of the Edifices which Shoghi Effendi had envisaged as being located on a far-flung arc, surrounding the resting-places of the members of the Holy Family. This achievement opened the way for the announcement in 1987 of the project for erection of the remaining buildings of the World Administrative Center of the Faith and for the construction of the eighteen monumental Terraces contemplated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, below and above the Shrine of the Báb. It signaled a major step toward the consummation of the vision expressed by the Guardian as "the splendor of the institutions which that triumphant Faith must erect on the slopes of a mountain, destined to be so linked with the city of 'Akká that a single grand metropolis will be formed to enshrine the spiritual as well as the administrative seats of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth."

The Edifices and Terraces now under construction are a manifest expression of the emergence from obscurity of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and of the determining role it is ordained to play in the affairs of

humankind. When the buildings are completed, they will stand as the visible seat of mighty institutions whose purpose is no other than the spiritualization of humanity and the preservation of justice and unity throughout the world. The future significance of the Terraces is evident from their characterization by Shoghi Effendi as “the Pathway of the Kings and Rulers of the World.” The beauty and magnificence of the Gardens and Terraces now under development are symbolic of the nature of the transformation which is destined to occur both within the hearts of the world’s peoples and in the physical environment of the planet.

The establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on Mount Carmel at this juncture in the fortunes of mankind is essential to hasten the accomplishment of God’s purpose for humanity through the operation of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. The believers are called upon to sustain this vast collective enterprise upon which the community of the Most Great Name is now embarked, through a sacrificial outpouring of material resources and through their dedication to the work of the Cause at this time of unprecedented need and opportunity.

Mount Carmel was extolled by the prophet Isaiah almost three thousand years ago, when he announced that “it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.” Now, with the coming of the Lord of Hosts, His devoted servants throughout the world have been summoned to the momentous undertaking with which the fulfillment of this ancient promise is associated. As they dedicate themselves to this mighty task, let them draw inspiration from these Words of Bahá’u’lláh: “Carmel, in the Book of God, hath been designated as the Hill of God, and His Vineyard. It is here that, by the grace of the Lord of Revelation, the Tabernacle of Glory hath been raised. Happy are they that attain thereunto; happy they that set their faces towards it.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **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 Center, 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 Counselors 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 Counselors, 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 Center, underscore the importance of completing the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the buildings for the World Administrative Center 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 Ḥuqúqu'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 programs. 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 programs 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 endeavors, 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 traveling teachers have knit ever more closely the fabric of the Bahá'í community. Leading the way in such achievements, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih 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 Rúḥíyyih Khánum 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 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá for the election of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Slovenia and Croatia in Ljubljana; Counselor 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 Counselor 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 'Ishqábád, 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 endeavor 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.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]





## **The Universal House of Justice**

17 May 1994

To the youth gathered at the five Regional Bahá'í Youth Conferences in Barcelona, Berlin, Bucharest, Saint Petersburg, and Wolverhampton

Beloved Friends,

During this past year, with the encouragement of the European Bahá'í Youth Council, a new movement among this generation of Bahá'í youth has been gathering momentum throughout the continent. Like the swelling of a tide, some waves may be but wavelets as yet, but the time for such an upsurge is here. Surely the successive impulses of training seminars, of the conference of National Bahá'í Youth Committees held in April, and now of these five continent-wide conferences, will reinforce the eagerness of the youth to rise and seize the challenge to play their part in reshaping the life of the peoples of the European continent.

It is but a century and a half since two young men sat in an upper room of the city of Shiraz; one the Manifestation of God revealing the first Words of God for this era, the other His first disciple. Within the space of six years, both had laid down their lives so that this outpouring of Divine Revelation might quicken all humankind. By that time, hundreds and thousands of eager hearts, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, had arisen to welcome the breaking of the Dawn of Divine Guidance and champion the truth before the world.

Now we see that the world has become another world. As Bahá'u'lláh has written: "Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."

You have come together from lands which are troubled by many different ills: ecological, economic, political, social, intellectual and, above all, moral and spiritual. You are aware that some of your peers are desperately seeking solutions and, too often alas, are driven to violent means to combat those immediate evils which fill their vision. Others turn aside, despairingly or cynically from any thought that a remedy is possible. You know the solution, you have the vision, you have the guidance and you are the recipients of the spiritual power which can enable you to triumph over all adversities and bring new life to the youth of Europe.

To be young is not easy. There are so many calls on one's time and energy because, not only are you summoned to perform the duties of the day, but also to prepare yourselves for the tasks which will be yours during the remainder of your lives. In weighing how to apportion your time and energy to such a multitude of activities you can call upon the power of consultation with your parents, your friends, and the divinely created institutions of the Bahá'í administration.

Those of you who are at a point in your studies or careers where you can devote a special period of service to the Cause of God, may be able to respond to the call of the Youth Council for an army of youth-year-of-

service volunteers to go out after these conferences to accelerate the winning of the goals of the Three Year Plan in Europe. Those who cannot serve in this way have other avenues of service in their own countries and abroad. For all of you there is the opportunity and the need to present the Teachings of the Cause to all whom you meet, through your character, your behavior, your unity, your deeds and your words, and to win their allegiance to the Faith.

May the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse rush to your aid, and may Bahá'u'lláh bless and guide every step you take for the advancement of His Cause.

We shall remember you all in our prayers in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

19 May 1994

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We recall with much joy and deep gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh your presence in the Holy Land only a short while ago during the month of the Fast. Your urgent request to which we acceded by meeting with all nine of your members in intensive consultations over a period of three days—a new fact of history in itself—initiated another phase in the evolution of your Assembly and reinforced the bonds that bind the American Bahá'í community to the World Center of the Faith. Our hearts were touched by the candor, courage, and sincerity with which your members presented your concerns, as well as by the spirit of optimism you displayed despite the overwhelming challenges and burdens which prompted your request for a meeting with us.

Having considered the various points and queries you raised, we are now able to respond to those which fall under the broad categories of teaching, relations between your National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Counselors, and the functioning of your Assembly.

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Regarding your “Vision in Action” initiative, you reported evidences of a tremendous response, some movement, and some expansion; furthermore, the stimulus of the recent Atlanta conference spearheaded by the Continental Counselors caused a marked acceleration of activities. In sum, the friends have seldom been more visibly active, but growth is slow; you feel the community has for some time been on the threshold of a breakthrough which remains elusive. The degeneration of society, as manifested by the breakdown of moral standards and the alarming increase of violence, you feel, is exerting a debilitating effect on the individual believer. You yearn for a way to free the teaching potential which to a large extent is locked up in the individual in the face of these dreadful circumstances.

We feel that an overanxiousness on your part about a breakthrough and an undue worry over the state of society can be counterproductive. While there are opportunities for greater growth than is occurring, neither your Assembly nor the friends must burden themselves with feelings of failure at every disappointment, for such feelings are self-fulfilling and can easily cause stagnation in the expansion of the Cause. The tendency towards frustration, sometimes induced by a desire for instant gratification, must be resisted by an effort to gain deeper appreciation of the divine process. In exhorting the individual concerning the spiritual obligation resting upon him “to make of the mandate of teaching, so vitally binding upon all, the all-pervading concern of his life,” Shoghi Effendi said that “every bearer of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh should consider it not only an obligation but a privilege to scatter far and wide the seeds of His Faith, and to rest content in the abiding knowledge that whatever be the immediate response to that Message, and however inadequate the vehicle that conveyed it, the power of its Author will, as He sees fit,

enable those seeds to germinate, and in circumstances which no one can foresee enrich the harvest which the labor of His followers will gather." You may rest assured that your particularly blessed community will not be denied a triumphant expansion if its members remain constant and confident in their teaching activities.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the prospects towards the breakthrough you anticipate in the teaching field are conspicuous in the current, distressing state of society. You must realize that the worse conditions become, the more plentiful are the opportunities to teach the Cause, the greater the degree of receptivity to the Divine Message. Bahá'u'lláh certainly gave ample foreknowledge about the radical, worldwide disturbance which His Revelation is creating as a part of the transition towards the unity and peace that are the ultimate goal of His Faith. Your awareness of this inevitable transition should enable your members to detach themselves from the debilitating emotions aroused by the turmoil which characterizes this process and to equip your Assembly as the highest governing body of the Bahá'í community in the United States to demonstrate to the friends a confident outlook, which the persistence and vigor of their teaching activities will fully justify.

Such detachment as exemplified by your Assembly and practiced by the friends throughout the community will, moreover, signify a spiritual achievement which was anticipated by Shoghi Effendi in his warning to your community, when he said: "The glowing tributes, so repeatedly and deservedly paid to the capacity, the spirit, the conduct, and the high rank, of the American believers, both individually and as an organic community, must, under no circumstances, be confounded with the characteristics and nature of the people from which God has raised them up." In other words, by the attainment of a "sharp distinction between that community and that people," you and the friends who rely upon your guidance will recognize that American society cannot be exempted from the rigors and consequences of the transition affecting all the world.

Painful as may be the decadent scene, deep as is your sympathy for those who suffer from the terrible decline of society, you must see the possibilities which are thus provided for augmenting the healing forces of an emerging World Order. Shoghi Effendi advised the North American community plainly in this regard. "The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must," he asserted, "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."

Commenting further on the global spectacle of upheavals, cataclysms and tribulations which the worsening affairs of humanity evoke at the impending approach of the Kingdom of God on earth, Shoghi Effendi addressed these words of insight and encouragement to the North American friends: "Far from yielding in their resolve, far from growing oblivious of their task, they should, at no time, however much buffeted by circumstances, forget that the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work of Providence, the design of an

inscrutable Wisdom, and the purpose of an all-compelling Will, a Will that directs and controls, in its own mysterious way, both the fortunes of the Faith and the destinies of men. Such 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, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

Moreover, the beloved Guardian felt that: "Reflections such as these should steel the resolve of the entire Bahá'í community, should dissipate their forebodings, and arouse them to rededicate themselves to every single provision of that Divine Charter whose outline has been delineated for them by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá." By being attuned to this divine perspective, your Assembly will be able to assist the friends to see that they will not merely be able to cope with the alarming incidents of social decline they are daily witnessing, but even better than that, they will be inspired to arise with renewed vision to recruit to Bahá'í membership an increasing number of men and women whose minds and hearts are ready to respond to the Divine Message and who will join them in dispelling the bewilderment and despair gripping their fellow citizens and undermining the structure of their country.

It is also vital for your Assembly to keep in mind that the mental anguish which the prevailing situation induces can and must be overcome through prayer and a conscious attention to teaching the Cause and living the Bahá'í life with a world-embracing vision. Certainly, the members of such a well established community as yours, one enjoying the special favors providentially conferred upon it by the Tablets of the Divine Plan, do realize the urgency and seriousness of their task. Surely they see with what patient endurance the dear friends in the Cradle of the Faith are meeting their God-given challenges even to the extent of sacrificing their life's blood so that the world may become a better place. Undoubtedly, the highly esteemed American believers, who bear the designation "spiritual descendants of the Dawn-breakers," know quite well that they must now seize their chance at this critical time to prove their own capacity to endure that living sacrifice which, as Shoghi Effendi said, in contrast to dying, is required of them if they are to fulfill the glorious destiny forecast for them in the scriptures of our Faith. May they be granted the celestial strength to pass, over and over again, the mental tests which 'Abdu'l-Bahá promised He would send to them to purify them, thus enabling them to achieve their divinely conferred potential as a force for change in the world.

In the arena of teaching, your indispensable terms of reference and the unerring resource to which you have ready access are the Master's Tablets of the Divine Plan. They invest your community with extraordinary powers shared by your sister community in Canada. It is in reacquainting the American friends with the special mission, both at home and abroad, assigned to them in these seminal and timeless documents, and in relating their contents to current conditions, that you will find the key to the revitalization of the teaching work and the winning of outstanding victories on the home front. In this effort you will be powerfully aided by the explanations provided in the letters of our dear Guardian, such as *The Advent of Divine Justice*, "The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour," "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril." We have every confidence that, together with the Continental Counselors and the

Auxiliary Board members, you can discover the way further to release the enormous energies of the friends and to intensify the zeal which they have so splendidly displayed in the teaching field on so many occasions in the past.

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We were very pleased by the sense you conveyed of an ever-closer relationship between your Assembly and the Continental Counselors, and we were even more deeply impressed by your eagerness to know how you might strengthen this relationship. A beginning towards achieving your desire would be for you to obtain an integrated understanding of the Counselors' responsibilities and sphere of action in relation to your own.

As you know, a distinguishing feature of the Administrative Order is the existence of elected institutions, on the one hand, which function corporately with vested legislative, executive and judicial powers, and of appointed, eminent and devoted believers, on the other hand, who function primarily as individuals for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith under the guidance of the Head of the Faith. The two sets of institutions collaborate in their functions so as to ensure the progress of the Cause. You are undoubtedly aware of the previous exposition of this subject; however, we offer the following comments to assist your further understanding of the matter.

The Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies share in the functions of propagation and protection, but the Counselors specialize in these functions from a different level and in a different manner. From a continental vantage point, the Counselors bring a perspective to their functions which, when offered to a National Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or commentary, enriches the latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

An aspect of the difference in the manner of functioning of the Counselors derives from the instructions given in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Hands of the Cause of God, the extension into the future of whose functions of protection and propagation is the responsibility of the Counselors. As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counselors assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through their Auxiliary Boards, the Continental Counselors spread the benefits of their functions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community. These functions are shaped by their obligations, in the words of the Will and Testament, "to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things." It can be seen, then, that through their work in propagating and protecting the Faith, the Counselors play a major role in knitting and bolstering the entire fabric of the Bahá'í community.

The flexibility and speed with which the Counselors and their Auxiliary Board members can respond to a perceived need in the community—such as a need for encouragement, explanation of plans, deepening in

the Teachings, protection of the Covenant—are elements of their functioning which distinguish them from Spiritual Assemblies; this flexibility enables them to operate as occasions demand, whether it is in giving counsel at a meeting, or advising an individual in private, or helping the friends to understand and obey a ruling of the Spiritual Assembly, or dealing with issues of the Covenant. In such different modes these officers of the Faith are able to draw attention to relevant Texts, to impart information, explore situations, and acquaint themselves with conditions in ways not possible to a Spiritual Assembly but important to the success of its plans. They are able then to share with Spiritual Assemblies, as deemed necessary, ideas, analyses, perceptions and advice which inevitably enhance the ability of these Assemblies to serve their communities. They thus assist Assemblies to mature. Where Local Assemblies are new or weak, Auxiliary Board members help them to understand their functions, encourage them to organize their work, and rally the local believers in support of their Assemblies' initiatives.

Through the various modes of their activities, the Counselors aided by their Auxiliary Boards spark and buttress the growth and development of Spiritual Assemblies and local and national communities. With this perspective, Shoghi Effendi's regarding of the Auxiliary Board members as "a prop and mainstay to the often overworked and overburdened National Spiritual Assemblies" becomes clear. The indispensability of the involvement of Continental Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in the planning stages of the teaching work and the benefits of acquainting them with the hopes and concerns of National Spiritual Assemblies and of seeking their advice are also obvious.

With the opening of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, a procedure was activated by which the goals of national plans are formulated in joint consultations of National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Counselors. It initiated a new phase in the maturation of the Administrative Order. This development ensures two significant benefits in particular: It enables each institution to draw on the experiences and insights particular to the other, thereby making available to the planning process two distinct channels of information from two levels of Bahá'í administration; and it also assures to the Counselors a necessary familiarity with the background, rationale, and content of national plans, which as a matter of principle they are expected to support. Both institutions obtain strength from such collaboration, and we are particularly pleased that the designing of the Three Year Plan in the United States followed a pattern which involved the two arms of the administration in the manner you described to us.

While the Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards, in addition to the discharge of their specific responsibilities, will support the initiatives adopted by a National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should recognize that the Counselors must be free to determine, according to their own best judgment, in what manner that support will be given. There is a great difference between the functions of national committees and Auxiliary Board members in this respect. Whereas the committees may be required by the Assembly to follow particular procedures, Auxiliary Board members are not similarly bound; yet they should not act in a manner that undermines the operations of the National Assembly or its agencies. This does not mean that Auxiliary Board members may not decide, upon request or not, to participate in the execution of a particular program or educational project devised by a national committee, or even to contribute towards the conceptualization and fruition of the project. It does mean, however, that their

prerogative to proceed within a wider latitude than that accessible to the national committee should be respected.

By working at the grassroots of the community, an Auxiliary Board member is often able to satisfy a need not being met by any national or local program, but which if dealt with by the Auxiliary Board member will better equip the local friends to achieve the established goals of the community. Such a flexibility on the part of the Auxiliary Board member in dealing with immediate situations, such a freedom for independent action, should be taken for granted by all concerned. However, a pattern of activity on the part of the Auxiliary Board member, or even of a Counselor, which appears to the National Assembly to be seriously diverting attention from the adopted plans of the community should unhesitatingly be made a matter for remedial consultation with the Counselor.

The Counselors are members of a continental, as distinct from a national, institution, and they occupy a rank higher than that of the National Spiritual Assembly. Apart from any other consideration, their rank is, in a practical sense, a functional necessity if these officers of the Faith are to be accorded freedom of the community at all levels and their advice and other functions are to be taken seriously. We have said in an earlier letter that "the existence of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who play such a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá'í administration unparalleled in the religions of the past." It is a difficult concept to grasp. But with the passage of time since the first contingent of Continental Counselors was appointed, much understanding has surely been acquired.

Shoghi Effendi stated categorically to your Assembly: "There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Bahá'í jurisdiction whether local, national or international." The authority of a National Assembly is therefore not diminished but, rather, enhanced by the existence of the Continental Counselors, who are duty bound by the very character of their responsibilities as protectors of the Faith to uphold the rank and to support the authority of Spiritual Assemblies. Similarly, the National Assembly must, on the basis of principle and in its own best interest, ensure that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members are not hampered in carrying out their sacred responsibilities and that their right and freedom to function are upheld.

The attitude of these two institutions towards each other should be motivated not merely by a legalistic application of the rules of their functional relationship. Far more is required, for they must, in the first place, approach their joint responsibilities within the framework of the spiritual requisites for all successful Bahá'í relationships. Where love, respect and courtesy are genuinely and mutually expressed, estrangement finds no accommodation and problems become soluble challenges. Bahá'u'lláh's admonition is highly instructive in this regard; He says: "Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you."

Achieving a closer and more effective relationship between you and the Continental Counselors will depend on the cultivation of an incrementally harmonious attitude and on an openness in your dealings



with them which this attitude will certainly facilitate. The relationship between you should be one of fellowship informed with a sense of respect but devoid of the rigid formalities associated with so many social organizations. When you have doubts and concerns about your own plans, confide in the Counselors; when something they do causes you worry, talk to them in the proper spirit of Bahá'í consultation. Remember that they, like yourselves, are burdened with the work of the Cause and are beset with many concerns in its service, and they need your sympathetic understanding of the challenges they face. Open your hearts and your minds to them; regard them as your confidants, your loving friends. And be ever ready to extend to them your hand in support.

The existence of a loving, trusting and informal atmosphere in your dealings with the Counselors should not, however, be allowed to relax adherence to the rules governing the working relationship between the Continental Board of Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards, on the one hand, and the National Spiritual Assembly and its committees, on the other. These matters are explained in detail in our letter of 1 October 1969, which you have published.

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We now wish to address the manner of your functioning as a National Spiritual Assembly. Your analysis of the situation identified the issues of immediate concern about the national administration of the Faith, such issues as: overcentralization, particularly with regard to the administration of the teaching work; your fear that you may be exercising a level of administrative control that may be stifling individual initiative throughout the country; and the relation of your Assembly to the community.

You live in a society caught in the tightening grip of moral decadence on a vast scale. But this should come as no surprise to you. It is the unavoidable consequence of a pervasive godlessness; its symptoms and repercussions were described in painful detail by Shoghi Effendi in several of his letters to the Western friends. Inevitably, the American Bahá'í community is affected by this condition to some extent. The corrosive influence of an overbearing and rampant secularization is infecting the style of administration of the Faith in your community and threatening to undermine its efficacy.

The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly capitalist culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly democratic system; the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the skepticism towards established authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships resulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences—such unsavory characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá'í community and over the behavior of portions of its rank and file in relation to the Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, deliberate effort—an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself. Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your community, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough. It was due to this concern in particular that we anxiously welcomed your request for a meeting with us.

The guarantee of well-being and success in all your endeavors to serve the Cause of God can be stated in one word: unity. It is the alpha and omega of all Bahá'í objectives. Among the first admonitions addressed to National Spiritual Assemblies by Shoghi Effendi was the following assertion: "It is, I firmly believe, of the utmost urgent importance that, with unity of purpose and action firmly established in our midst, and with every trace of animosity and mistrust of the past banished from our hearts, we should form one united front, and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by dogmatic and sectarian belief." He then stated that "it is primarily upon the elected members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world that this highly important duty devolves," warning that, "should such a representative and responsible body fail to realize this fundamental requisite for all successful achievement, the whole structure is sure to crumble."

Unity within the Assembly itself is, of course, of immediate importance to the wider unity your actions are intended to foster and sustain. At no time can any member of your Assembly afford to be unmindful of this basic requirement nor neglect to work towards upholding it. Of particular relevance is the attitude that the members adopt towards their membership on that exalted body. There needs to be a recognition on their part of the Assembly's spiritual character and a feeling in their hearts of respect for the institution based upon a perception of it as something beyond or apart from themselves, as a sacred entity whose powers they have the privilege to engage and canalize by coming together in harmony and acting in accordance with divinely revealed principles. With such a perspective the members will be able better to acquire an appropriate posture in relation to the Assembly itself, to appreciate their role as Trustees of the Merciful and to counteract any impression that they have assumed ownership and control of the institution in the manner of major stockholders of a business enterprise.

Also relevant to effecting unity is the attitude of the friends, whether serving on any Assembly or not, towards the exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community. People generally tend to be suspicious of those in authority. The reason is not difficult to understand, since human history is replete with examples of the disastrous misuse of authority and power. A reversal of this tendency is not easily achievable, but the Bahá'í friends must be freed of suspicion towards their institutions if the wheels of progress are to turn with uninterrupted speed. A rigorous discipline of thought and action on the part of both the friends and the National Assembly will succeed in meeting this challenge; both must live up to their responsibilities in this regard by recognizing some fundamental realities.

The oneness of humanity, which is the primary principle and ultimate goal of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, implies, as Shoghi Effendi said, an "organic change in the structure of present-day society." So fundamental a change in the structural conception of society must also imply a new pattern for the administration of community affairs in a Bahá'í context. The insights offered by the beloved Guardian, as conveyed by his secretary in a letter dated 14 October 1941, shed light on this critical subject:

The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of

mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living.

Shoghi Effendi's advice to an individual in another instance provides a further perspective: "He urges you to do all you can to promote unity and love amongst the members of the Community there, as this seems to be their greatest need. So often young communities, in their desire to administer the Cause, lose sight of the fact that these spiritual relationships are far more important and fundamental than the rules and regulations which must govern the conduct of community affairs."

It can therefore be deduced that the importance of the Bahá'í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends. This touches upon a distinguishing characteristic of Bahá'í life which such spiritual relationships foster, namely, the spirit of servitude to God, expressed in service to the Cause, to the friends and to humanity as a whole. The attitude of the individual as a servant, an attitude preeminently exemplified in the life and person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a dynamic that permeates the activities of the Faith; it acquires collective, transformative force in the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the institutions of the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic. It is in this framework that the concepts of rulership and leadership, authority and power are properly understood and actualized.

The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other's distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is a part of themselves, that their cooperative interactions with that divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a transformation exist most immediately at the local level, but it is a major responsibility of the National Assembly to nurture the conditions in which they may flourish.

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the mass of the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered. The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this mass power, this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a malleable form susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

Individual initiative is a preeminent aspect of this power; it is therefore a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it. Similarly, it is important for individuals to recognize and accept that the institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of civilization. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members of the institutions.

The successful exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community implies the recognition of separate but mutually reinforcing rights and responsibilities between the institutions and the friends in general, a recognition that in turn welcomes the need for cooperation between these two interactive forces of society. As was stated in advice given by Shoghi Effendi: "The individuals and assemblies must learn to cooperate, and to cooperate intelligently, if they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the Faith. And no such cooperation is possible without mutual confidence and trust."

Direction comes from Assembly decisions, but its effectiveness depends not only on the clarity with which it is given but also on a number of spiritual and moral factors which must be blended in the general attitude of the individual believers, on the one hand, and the manner and style of the functioning of the Assembly, on the other. The following advice of Shoghi Effendi, addressed in an early letter to the Western friends, deals with these two aspects:

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote to the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candor and courage on the other.

The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends

whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection.

These instructions of the beloved Guardian get to the very heart of what must be more deeply internalized by the members of your Assembly at this time. We repeat for emphasis the terms “extreme humility,” “open-mindedness,” “candor,” “modesty”; and we underscore the openness which is implicit in candor, because the cooperation which must be fostered between your Assembly and the friends will depend significantly on the degree to which, with wise discretion, you share your concerns with the community. Your greatest opportunity for this is the annual National Convention, when the representatives of the entire community come together to consult with you. It is not sufficient that you give only good news and encouraging statistics to the delegates. Do as Shoghi Effendi advised you: “Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates.”

Even if the delegates find themselves unable to offer useful recommendations toward the resolution of particular issues, by your bringing them into your confidence, they will develop an appreciation, as would be impossible otherwise, of the serious matters confronting the Cause. With this understanding, they will be equipped to assist the community to respond effectively to your decisions, no matter how challenging these may turn out to be. Moreover, it will relieve you of any overwhelming sense of burden to know that such a responsible body of believers shares your innermost concerns; and even more than that, the effect of your openness will be to strengthen the delegates’ support of your authority, which it is their sacred duty to give. Besides, as it is neither possible nor practicable for your Assembly to meet with all the believers, nor for the members to be constantly traveling throughout the community, the friends’ feeling that you are remote can be ameliorated, though not entirely removed, by the effectiveness of your interactions with the delegates.

In your openness and candor you will, no doubt, avoid ineptitudes that pass as norms in the freedom of speech practiced in your nation. In a society where “telling it like it is” employs a style of expression which robs language of its decorum, and in a time when stridency is commonly presumed to be a quality of leadership, candor is crass, and authority speaks in a loud and vulgar voice. People are frequently obliged to receive direction from their leaders in such disrespectful modes; this is a reason for resentment and suspicion towards those in authority. By contrast, Bahá’í institutions have the task of accustoming the friends to recognizing the expression of authority in language at a moderate pitch.

It would be impossible to overestimate the obligation resting upon you to refine your dealings with the community in the ways already described. You cannot at any time afford to forget that the manner of the use of authority is critical to the success of your work. With this in mind, you must also attend seriously to the behavior of those, more particularly your officers, who must of necessity act on your behalf in carrying out your decisions and conveying your instructions to others. Further, it is sometimes the case that staff members at your National Center, in their eagerness to be exactly and completely obedient, carry out the instruction of your Assembly with a sharpness of manner and tone that hurts people and provokes resentment against the very body the staff are striving to serve with loyalty and devotion. The staff should be sensitized to the situation and made to realize, through your loving and persistent guidance, that the spiritual requisites for good and respectful relations with others must be conscientiously applied in their interactions with the friends because to do so is not only virtuous in itself but will also minimize the incidence of bad feeling towards your Assembly.

The temperament of authority in the administration of justice varies according to the degree of the gravity of each case. Some cases require that the Assembly take action that is firm or drastic. Even so, Assembly members have always to be mindful that the authority they wield must in general be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is acceptable to spiritually attuned and fair-minded souls. The following guidance of Shoghi Effendi, as conveyed by his secretary, is especially relevant: "The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with firm determination to act with justice in all cases which are submitted to them for their consideration."

Do clearly bear in mind that our emphasis of the spiritual requisites of your functioning is not a mere expression of pious idealism. Far, far from it. Their exclusion from public discourse and from the considerations of world leaders largely accounts for the current state of society. Indeed, they are as practical in effect as they are spiritual in essence. Employ them consciously, constantly, confidently; and see how your actions will attract the confirmations of the Holy Spirit in the response of the community.

As to your worry about overcontrolling the friends: by appreciating the nature of the power of action which they possess, you will be able to gauge how best to guide and direct them. A wide latitude for action must be allowed them, which means that a large margin for mistakes must also be allowed. Your National Assembly and the Local Assemblies must not react automatically to every mistake, but distinguish between those that are self-correcting with the passage of time and do no particular harm to the community and those which require Assembly intervention. Related to this is the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provocation, whereas the Teachings call upon them to encourage each other. Such tendencies are of course motivated by a deep love for the Faith, a desire to see it free of any flaw. But human beings are not perfect. The Local Assemblies and the friends must be helped through your example and through loving counsel to refrain from such a pattern of criticism, which stunts the growth and development of the community. You should also be fearful of laying down too many rules and regulations.

The Cause is not so fragile that a degree of mistakes cannot be tolerated. When you feel that certain actions may become trends with harmful consequences, you may, instead of making a new rule, discuss the matter with the Counselors, enlisting their support in educating the friends in a manner that will improve their understanding and their conduct.

A new burst of energy would accrue to the operation of the Three Year Plan if the friends, both individually and collectively, could feel a greater sense of freedom to engage in a wide range of activities originating with themselves. Even if you are doing nothing deliberately to discourage such freedom, their accumulated impression of institutional disapproval, however derived, and their fear of criticism are, to a considerable extent, inhibiting their exercise of initiative. At this exact time in history when the peoples of the world are weighed down with soul-crushing difficulties and the shadow of despair threatens to eclipse the light of hope, there must be revived among the individual believers a sense of mission, a feeling of empowerment to minister to the urgent need of humanity for guidance and thus to win victories for the Faith in their own sphere of life. The community as a whole should be involved in efforts to resolve such issues. A single answer would, of course, be inadequate, there being so many diverse elements and interests in the community. These matters require not only your own independent consultation but consultation with the Counselors as well. Although Spiritual Assemblies are good at specifying goals, they have not yet mastered the art of making use of the talents of individuals and rousing the mass of the friends to action in fulfillment of such goals. Removing this deficiency would be a mark of the maturation of these institutions. May your Assembly lead the way.

A further decentralization of the national administration would increase the possibility of loosening control at the top and encouraging the involvement of individuals in the work of the community at the grassroots. We therefore welcome your intention to take such action. However, you may wish to do this in incremental steps rather than in one sweeping motion. The matter is left entirely to your judgment. It may encourage you to know that in a few countries where the challenge of administering the teaching work and providing other administrative services assumed formidable proportions, various approaches have been used to achieve a measure of decentralization. A detailed description of some of these approaches will be sent to you separately.

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Having said all the foregoing, we pause to assure you of our full awareness of the great burdens you carry and of the ceaseless calls upon you to render services in the absence of adequate resources. Do not despair. Your capacity to respond will match any challenge that may confront you in these troubled times; you have only to act on principle. Your community's past has been glorious; its future is great beyond calculation. The divine promises to your community are certain; the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh are assured as you strive to fulfill His purpose. The wings of the beloved Master remain spread over you that you may succeed in discharging the tasks He has especially entrusted to your care. And our love ever surrounds you and your cherished community, growing stronger at every moment. Step forward then to meet the requirements of the hour with undiminished hope and confidence.

The power released by Bahá'u'lláh works at a quickening pace, speeding the processes of change which must usher in the new order He proclaimed. The declining state of society demonstrates it, the global yearning for new solutions to human problems confirms it. Much is at stake: the fortunes of humankind hang precariously in the balance. The Bahá'í community bears grave responsibilities toward the near and far future as movement towards the Lesser Peace accelerates. Now is the time for the friends to seize new opportunities to extend the range and influence of the Faith, to reach a new level of action in expanding the community and fortifying its foundations. It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity. Will the American Bahá'í community not see its chance to meet the challenge? Will its members not once again blaze a trail that can set in motion a myriad victories?

Our ardent petition at the Holy Threshold is that the response of the champion-builders of the New World Order will be immediate, wholehearted and abundantly confirmed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]



## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

25 July 1994

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 June 1994 concerning the extraordinary behavior of one of the delegates at your recent National Convention.

How to deal with this situation would depend to some degree upon the believer in question; for example, whether he is a new and inexperienced Bahá'í or a long-time believer who would be expected to know better. This is a matter within your jurisdiction, but if you require any further advice from the Universal House of Justice on the specific case, you will need to provide it with more detailed information. In general it would, of course, be desirable for you to try to clarify the principles for this friend and help him to understand his responsibilities. At the same time you will wish to try to ascertain the reasons for his behavior so that you can assist him to overcome his problems.

To assist you in consulting with this friend, we enclose a few extracts from passages relating to the responsibilities of delegates to a National Bahá'í Convention.

Of all the responsibilities resting upon a delegate, that of voting for the members of the National Spiritual Assembly is clearly the most weighty. In carrying out this duty, the delegate must, prayerfully and conscientiously, vote for those whom he judges best fit the qualifications that the beloved Guardian has outlined for those who are to serve on Spiritual Assemblies and, in making this choice, he must be left free from every external influence by either individual believers or Bahá'í institutions. If he states that he has difficulty in thinking of nine Bahá'ís who measure up to the high standards mentioned, he could be referred to the following passage written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly on 24 October 1947:

In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá'í office, whatever its nature. But these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfill them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can. He does not feel the friends should attach so much importance to limitations—such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental concept of everyone being willing to do Bahá'í service on administrative bodies will be weakened, and the friends may be tempted to vote for those who because of independent means or circumstances in their lives are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve.

For a delegate to walk out of the convention hall at the time of the election would seem to indicate a disdain for the electoral process and a public abdication of his responsibilities, which would be quite improper. It is entirely within the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly to inquire the reason for such extraordinary behavior, inasmuch as it has the responsibility for the proper conduct of the Convention.

Furthermore, one of the responsibilities of a delegate is to report back from the Convention to the district by which he was elected. If this particular delegate does not explain to his electors the reason for his failure to vote, your Assembly would be fully entitled to report the occurrence to them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

### **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

1 August 1994

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 18 July 1994 has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to send the following reply....

You have asked how you can “overcome [your] view of the Faith as flawed.” Your comment correctly locates the difficulty, which inheres not in the Faith, in itself perfect, but in the inability of the finite human mind to fully grasp the import and perfection of the Teachings. Given the tremendous variety of culture and individual type, it should be clear upon reflection to any fair-minded observer that the Revelation of God cannot accord with all of the theories, whims and desiderata of mankind, which are in a constant state of flux and are the product of limited human aspirations, very often corrupted by selfish motives. Nor could it possibly be true that the Revelation as a whole would necessarily appear to a given observer to be in every way a perfect tapestry, according with one’s subjective concepts of beauty, elegance, coherence, order, rationality, etc.

Thus, it would not be surprising if, during the course of one’s life and as one’s understanding and perspective evolves, from time to time one finds aspects of the Faith that seem in conflict with one’s best understanding, particularly insofar as that understanding is informed by the broader society or culture around oneself. How one responds to such episodes is of critical importance to the maintenance of one’s faith. The task is to seek a larger context in which to understand the issue which is disturbing and to seek to prayerfully accept what one cannot for the time being understand. This is different from adopting an

antirational or romantic posture whereby one believes in all sorts of nonsense. Quite to the contrary, what one is doing in such a case is accepting the Teachings of One whose authority is acknowledged to be from God. This is the light of faith which enables a believer to weather difficult situations in which he cannot see his way clearly by the light of reason alone. It is an attitude which flows from a recognition of the finite nature of one's own mind and the inevitable limitations of one's experience. Bahá'u'lláh Himself urges us in the Hidden Words to "Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt and rise to the exalted heights of certainty."

Consider, when one looks about at the world and at the condition into which its peoples have fallen and the untold agony of human suffering, what could have caused such a lamentable state of affairs? Is it not a fair assumption that the reigning materialist worldview, with its inordinate emphasis on individual liberty and its discounting of ordering norms and mores, is at least partly to blame? Again, in *Gleanings*, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection." He also admonishes us:

Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies. Not for one day did it gain ease, nay its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of ignorant physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires, and have erred grievously. And if, at one time, through the care of an able physician, a member of that body was healed, the rest remained afflicted as before. Thus informeth you the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

If one extends this line of thinking yet a little further, is it not conceivable that many, if not most, of those who mould public opinion on issues such as sexuality are themselves steeped in a climate of thinking which influences and biases their reading of scientific evidence? To what degree then, one might ask, does this climate of opinion color the way one perceives the Revelation itself? This argument is suggested to you as a stimulus to your thinking as you grapple with the problem referred to in your letter. The intent is not to cast general aspersions on the entire scientific community or to suggest that there are not many reliable and clear-thinking leaders of public opinion.

A few things which one encounters in the Teachings do not lend themselves to rational analysis at all, but must be accepted in a spirit of deep faith. The ineligibility of women for service on the Universal House of Justice is one such instance. However, here again, the important thing is to view this fact within the larger context of what our Teachings actually say about the role of women and the role of men.

As you strive to acquire a fuller understanding of the Teachings, be assured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

15 December 1994

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 20 September 1994 to ... , concerning the degrees of authority possessed by Bahá'í historical sources, the process by which translations are authorized, the development of a "canon of Bahá'í doctrine," the status of documents prepared by the Research Department, and your request for various materials, was forwarded to the Universal House of Justice for its consideration. We are instructed to make the following reply to your questions numbered two, three and five. The remaining questions were referred to the Research Department for study. The enclosed memorandum and attachments represent the result of the deliberations of that Department.

Your questions concerning translation revolve around two major issues: the process by which new translations into the English language are authorized and the authority of the translations of Shoghi Effendi. We are asked to state that a translation is regarded as authorized when it is approved by one or more translation committees appointed by the Universal House of Justice. While members of the Research Department may well, from time to time, be appointed to serve on such a translation committee, the authorization of new translations is currently not one of the responsibilities assigned to the Research Department by the House of Justice. Further, the approval of a translation does not mean that improvements or amendments cannot be made to it in the future. As you, yourself, note, even Shoghi Effendi described his translation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán as

... one more attempt to introduce to the West, in a language however inadequate, this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation. The hope is that it may assist others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded as the unattainable goal—a befitting rendering of Bahá'u'lláh's matchless utterance.

As to the policy concerning the publication of new translations of the Writings made by individual Bahá'ís, we are instructed to convey the fact that translations into English and revisions of earlier translations in that language must be checked by a translation committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and officially approved for publication. While individuals are permitted to paraphrase or describe the contents of the passages they have translated and to include them in their manuscripts, without reference to the World Center, new translations need to be submitted to the Universal House of Justice for checking and approval prior to publication. The importance of this policy lies in the fact that translations into most other languages are based on the approved English texts and are not made directly or solely from the original texts. There have been, however, occasions when the House of Justice has permitted the publication of provisional translations made by individuals whose work is known to it. In these cases the translations usually appear in scholarly or other publications of limited distribution and are not likely to be used as a basis for translations into other languages.

You ask whether the translations of Shoghi Effendi should be considered as the “standard” and whether, because of his function as infallible interpreter, the Guardian’s translations provide “the true interpretation of the Writings.” We are asked to call attention to the Introduction to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* where the Universal House of Justice describes the essential qualities of the Guardian’s translations and the fact that they “are illumined by his uniquely inspired understanding of the purport and implications of the originals.”

In view of your observations that “the chain of interpretation is unbroken, from the Báb to Bahá’u’lláh to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Shoghi Effendi,” and that “the ‘authorized’ interpretation of the Writings ends with the Guardian,” you ask about the possibility of establishing a “canon of Bahá’í doctrine which could then be regarded as ‘authorized’ and ‘official,’” and which would serve as a means by which “truth could be separated from falsehood according to the divinely revealed and interpreted standard.” In this regard, the House of Justice asks us to state that, while it would be possible to codify and cross-reference the Bahá’í teachings, it would also be important to take into account such functions assigned to the Universal House of Justice in the Bahá’í Writings as its role in elucidating all matters “which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book” and in ensuring the essential flexibility of the Cause.

The elucidations of the Universal House of Justice stem from its legislative function, and as such differ from interpretation. The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable.

As to your question concerning whether the translations, compilations and other works prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre should be considered as partaking in the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice and, therefore, constituting the “final word,” the House of Justice indicates that such materials, though prepared at its direction, represent the views of that Department. While such views are very useful as an aid to resolving perplexities or gaining an enhanced understanding of the Bahá’í teachings, they should never be taken to be in the same category as the elucidations and clarifications provided by the Universal House of Justice in the exercise of its assigned functions. However, the House of Justice chooses to convey the materials prepared by the Research Department to the friends because it wishes them to be thoughtfully attended to and seriously considered.

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the Universal House of Justice that your services to the Cause will be confirmed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

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 fulfillment 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. As 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 influences of the movement of International and Continental Counselors 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 vigor 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 endeavoring 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 endeavors, 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 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 Center of high-ranking government officials, other dignitaries and media representatives, demonstrating the growing significance of the spiritual and administrative center 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 center 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 fulfillment of the Three Year Plan goal of seventy-four million dollars is to be provided by Riḍván 1996.

The new year begins auspiciously with the formation this Riḍván of five National Spiritual Assemblies. Our representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánúm, Armenia and Georgia; the Hand of the Cause ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, Belarus and Sicily; Counselor 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 coworkers: 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 Riḍván 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,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

27 April 1995

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email of 19 February 1995 addressed to the Research Department was referred to the Universal House of Justice. In it you quote two phrases which appear in a book you have recently read, and which seem from the context to be citations from Shoghi Effendi. These phrases are "Bahá'í theocracy" and "humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate." You ask whether these references can be authenticated and dated. We have been instructed to send you the following reply.

A reference to "Bahá'í theocracy" is to be found in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual Bahá'í on 30 September 1949. This reads as follows:

He thinks your question is well put: what the Guardian was referring to was the theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely *given* as systems, but man-made, and yet, being partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muḥammad are in a sense theocracies. The Bahá'í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself.

The other passage does not comprise words of Shoghi Effendi, although its purport was approved by him. As you yourself have since discovered, it can be found in *The Bahá'í World*, volume VI, on page 199, in a statement entitled "Concerning Membership in Non-Bahá'í Religious Organizations," about which the Guardian's secretary had written on his behalf on 11 December 1935: "The Guardian has carefully read the copy of the statement you had recently prepared concerning nonmembership in non-Bahá'í religious organizations, and is pleased to realize that your comments and explanations are in full conformity with his views on the subject."

The complete paragraph in which the words appear is as follows:

In the light of these words, it seems fully evident that the way to approach this instruction is in realizing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as an ever-growing organism destined to become something new and greater than any of the revealed religions of the past. Whereas former Faiths inspired hearts and illumined souls, they eventuated in formal religions with an ecclesiastical organization, creeds, rituals and churches, while the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, likewise renewing man's spiritual life, will gradually produce the institutions of an ordered society, fulfilling not merely the function of the churches of the past but also the function of the civil state. By this manifestation of the Divine Will in a higher degree than in former ages, humanity will

emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate and competitive institutions, and partake of a true civilization in which spiritual and social principles are at last reconciled as two aspects of one and the same Truth.

You also ask how these statements could be reconciled with Shoghi Effendi's comment on page 149 of *Bahá'í Administration*, which appears to anticipate "a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separation of Church and State," and with the following words in his letter of 21 March 1932 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada:

Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

A careful reading of the letter dated 6 December 1928 in which the Guardian's comment about the separation of Church and State occurs would suggest that, rather than enunciating a general principle, Shoghi Effendi is simply reviewing "the quickening forces of internal reform" that had "recently transpired throughout the Near and Middle East," and enumerating a number of factors that impinge on the development of the Faith in those parts of the world.

As for the statement made by Shoghi Effendi in his letter of 21 March 1932, the well-established principles of the Faith concerning the relationship of the Bahá'í institutions to those of the country in which the Bahá'ís reside make it unthinkable that they would ever purpose to violate a country's constitution or so to meddle in its political machinery as to attempt to take over the powers of government. This is an integral element of the Bahá'í principle of abstention from involvement in politics. However, this does not by any means imply that the country itself may not, by constitutional means, decide to adopt Bahá'í laws and practices and modify its constitution or method of government accordingly. The relationship between the principle of abstention from involvement in politics and the emergence of the Bahá'í State is commented on later in this letter. In the meantime we can quote the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian in response to queries from individual believers, which indicate that the relationship is an evolving one:

Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi believes that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the explicit injunction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.... Eventually, however, as you have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon as it is fully developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues. In fact Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the Houses of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve.

(30 November 1930)

The Bahá'ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in some other countries as well.

(19 November 1939)

The Bahá'ís must remain non-partisan in all political affairs. In the distant future, however, when the majority of a country have become Bahá'ís then it will lead to the establishment of a Bahá'í State.

(19 April 1941)

A proper understanding of all the above passages, and of their implications, requires an acceptance of two fundamental principles for the exegesis of Bahá'í Texts.

The first, which derives from the Covenant, is the principle that the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and intimately linked with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. This principle is clearly expounded in two paragraphs from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer on 19 March 1946:

Whatever the Master has said is based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He was the perfect Interpreter, had lived with Him all His life; therefore what He says has the same standing, even if a text of Bahá'u'lláh is not available....

We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the two. That is what makes our Faith so flexible and well balanced. For instance there are calamities for testing and for punishment—there are also accidents, plain cause and effect!

Bahá'u'lláh has given us a Revelation designed to raise mankind to heights never before attained. It is little wonder that the minds of individual believers, no matter how perceptive, have difficulty in comprehending its range. It is the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian which elucidate this vast Revelation and make clear the manner in which different statements relate to one another and what is implied by the Revealed Word. Without the bright light of the Covenant, this Faith, like all those before it, would be torn to pieces by the conflicting opinions of scholars applying limited human reasoning to divinely revealed truths.

The second fundamental principle which enables us to understand the pattern towards which Bahá'u'lláh wishes human society to evolve is the principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use the simile of a tree. If a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear. The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, we find the following illuminating explanation in a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís in America on 23 February 1924:

And as we make an effort to demonstrate that love to the world may we also clear our minds of any lingering trace of unhappy misunderstandings that might obscure our clear conception of the exact purpose and methods of this new world order, so challenging and complex, yet so consummate and wise. We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications. But one word of warning must be uttered in this connection. Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the Divine Plan with the standard of men. I am not prepared to state that it agrees in principle or in method with the prevailing notions now uppermost in men's minds, nor that it should conform with those imperfect, precarious, and expedient measures feverishly resorted to by agitated humanity. Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit obedience, wholehearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings, the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles, what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world?

Pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, whose function it is to lay more definitely the broad lines that must guide the future activities and administration of the Movement, it is clearly our duty to strive to obtain as clear a view as possible of the manner in which to conduct the affairs of the Cause, and then arise with single-mindedness and determination to adopt and maintain it in all our activities and labors.

At this time we have the benefit of many subsequent interpretations by Shoghi Effendi and also the initial guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which will continue to elucidate aspects of this mighty system as it unfolds. In striving to attain a "clearer and fuller understanding" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, we need to contemplate the operation of the Bahá'í principles of governance and social responsibility as they persist through changing sets of conditions, from the present time when the Bahá'í community constitutes a small number of people living in a variety of overwhelmingly non-Bahá'í societies, to the far different situation in future centuries when the Bahá'ís are becoming, and eventually have become, the vast majority of the people.

The Administrative Order is certainly the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, but it is in embryonic form, and must undergo major evolutionary developments in the course of time. Certain passages in the writings on this subject establish matters of principle, certain ones describe the ultimate goal of the Most Great Peace, and certain of them relate to stages of development on the way to the attainment of that goal. For example, in this familiar passage in His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close

union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.

In response to a question about the “government” in the above passage, Shoghi Effendi’s secretary wrote on his behalf, on 18 April 1941, the following clarification:

By “Government” ... is meant the executive body which will enforce the laws when the Bahá’í Faith has reached the point when it is recognized and accepted entirely by any particular nation.

The same relationship between legislature and executive is expressed in the well-known passage in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” showing how one principle is applied over successive periods.

A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth.

In relation to other international institutions, the Guardian has given the following guidance:

Touching the point raised in the Secretary’s letter regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master’s explicit Instructions, all important fundamental questions must be referred.

In his letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada written on 27 February 1929, Shoghi Effendi stated:

Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá’í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise as the supreme organ of the Bahá’í Commonwealth all the rights, the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon the world’s future superstate.

Complementing these words are the Guardian’s repeated and forceful requirement that Bahá’ís strictly abstain from involvement in politics. This requirement has far-reaching implications for the method by which Bahá’u’lláh’s Administrative Order will evolve into His World Order. We can consider, for example, the well-known passage in his letter of 21 March 1932 to the Bahá’ís in the United States and Canada:

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.... Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá’u’lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the

politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men....

... Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals.

As one studies these words, one begins to understand the processes at work in the gradual unfoldment and establishment of the Bahá'í System.

Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a "political" enterprise, and the Teachings of the Faith are filled with "political" principles—using the word in the sense of the science of government and of the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá'í world community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a "political" organization, and Bahá'ís are required, on pain of deprivation of their administrative rights, to refrain from becoming involved in "political" matters and from taking sides in "political" disputes. In other words, the Bahá'ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behavior of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order is the "nucleus and pattern" of the divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly non-Bahá'í governments will benefit from learning how this system works and from adopting its procedures and principles in overcoming the problems they face. Nevertheless, this Administration is primarily the framework and structure designed to be a channel for the flow of the spirit of the Cause and for the application of its Teachings. As the Guardian wrote:

It is surely for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the Faith itself, lest undue concern for the minute details arising from the administration of the Cause obscure the vision of its promoters, lest partiality, ambition, and worldliness tend in the course of time to becloud the radiance, stain the purity, and impair the effectiveness of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The gradual process of the evolution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh has been described by Shoghi Effendi in many of his writings, as in the following excerpt from his letter of 30 April 1953 to the All-America Intercontinental Teaching Conference:

This present Crusade, on the threshold of which we now stand, will, moreover, by virtue of the dynamic forces it will release and its wide repercussions over the entire surface of the globe, contribute effectually to the acceleration of yet another process of tremendous significance which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Bahá'u'lláh through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition—stages one or another of which Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world now find themselves—to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh will be recognized by the civil authorities as the State Religion, similar to that which Christianity entered in the

years following the death of the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil matters, in strict accordance with the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth—the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh—mirroring however faintly upon this humble handful of dust the glories of the Abhá Kingdom.

In answer to those who raise objections to this vision of a worldwide commonwealth inspired by a Divine Revelation, fearing for the freedom of minority groups or of the individual under such a system, we can explain the Bahá'í principle of upholding the rights of minorities and fostering their interests. We can also point to the fact that no person is ever compelled to accept the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and moreover, unlike the situation in certain other religions, each person has complete freedom to withdraw from the Faith if he decides that he no longer believes in its Founder or accepts His Teachings. In light of these facts alone it is evident that the growth of the Bahá'í communities to the size where a non-Bahá'í state would adopt the Faith as the State Religion, let alone to the point at which the State would accept the Law of God as its own law and the National House of Justice as its legislature, must be a supremely voluntary and democratic process.

As the Universal House of Justice wrote in its letter of 21 July 1968 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States:

It is not our purpose to impose Bahá'í teachings upon others by persuading the powers that be to enact laws enforcing Bahá'í principles, nor to join movements which have such legislation as their aim. The guidance that Bahá'í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they arise, can be resolved.

Two quotations from the writings of the Guardian bear particularly on these principles of the rights and prerogatives of minorities and of individuals. In *The Advent of Divine Justice* is a passage which is of fundamental significance for Bahá'í constitutional law:

Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.

As for the protection of the rights of individuals, there is the following translation of a forceful passage which appears in a letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Iran, written in July 1925, in relation to a situation involving a Covenant-breaker:



... the mere fact of disaffection, estrangement, or recantation of belief, can in no wise detract from, or otherwise impinge upon, the legitimate civil rights of individuals in a free society, be it to the most insignificant degree. Were the friends to follow other than this course, it would be tantamount to a reversion on their part, in this century of radiance and light, to the ways and standards of a former age: they would reignite in men's breasts the fire of bigotry and blind fanaticism, cut themselves off from the glorious bestowals of this promised Day of God, and impede the full flow of divine assistance in this wondrous age.

All Bahá'ís, and especially those who make a profound study of the Cause, need to grasp the differences between the Bahá'í concepts of governance and those of the past, and to abstain from measuring Bahá'í institutions and methods against the faulty man-made institutions and methods hitherto current in the world. The Guardian graphically stressed these differences in his letter of 8 February 1934, known as "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh":

The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam—none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve the dilemmas of past societies are those of the unity of mankind on the one hand, and loyalty to the Covenant on the other. As already mentioned, no one in this Dispensation is compelled to be a Bahá'í, and the division of humankind into the "clean" and the "unclean," the "faithful" and the "infidels," is abolished. At the same time, anyone who does choose to be a Bahá'í accepts the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, while free expression of opinion within the Bahá'í community is encouraged, this cannot ever be permitted to degenerate to the level of undermining the Covenant, for this would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself.

One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

The House of Justice appreciates your concern about such a fundamental issue, and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your services to the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## **The Universal House of Justice**

Department of the Secretariat

19 May 1995

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has consulted on your email message of 4 April 1995 concerning the character of some of the postings on Bahá'í subjects in electronic discussion groups, and has asked us to convey to you the following.

Your concerns, in the context in which you have described them in the second paragraph of your message, are legitimate for a Bahá'í, and you should not hesitate to express them, as you wish, in a manner that is intended to illumine the exchange of ideas in any discussion in which you may participate.

The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a development eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation of "a mechanism of world intercommunication ... embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity."

As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As a medium for Bahá'ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same requirements of moderation, candor, and courtesy as would be the case in any other discussion. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the views of one another. In this regard, the House of Justice has noted your understandable repugnance at an apparent temptation to use misleading and invidious labels like "traditionalists" and "liberals," which divide the Bahá'í community. To the extent that this divisive habit of mind may persist in the Bahá'í community, it is obviously a carryover from non-Bahá'í society and a manifestation of an immature conception of life. If Bahá'ís were to persist in this mode of thinking, it would bring to naught even the most worthwhile intellectual endeavor, as has so conspicuously been the case with societies of the past.

Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá'ís of the beliefs and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework of the Bahá'í Teachings and the truths they enshrine. To attempt to discuss the Cause of God apart from or with disdain for the authoritative guidance inherent in these Teachings would clearly be a logical contradiction. To take the first point mentioned in your letter, it is obvious that seeking to impose limits on the universality of the authority of God's Manifestation would lead to the frustration of serious

scholarly work and generate disharmony within an effort whose success depends precisely upon a spirit of unity and mutual trust. The standard is the one made clear by Bahá'u'lláh Himself:

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that whatsoever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself.

With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the "leaven" within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavor, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situations where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct personal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity, Bahá'ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by sharing and discussing relevant Bahá'í texts. This will itself have the further effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá'í belief.

The House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf that the abundant confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may ever sustain you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

**The Universal House of Justice**

26 December 1995

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

Beloved Friends,

## The Four Year Plan

Our deliberations on the Four Year Plan have benefited enormously from the analysis the International Teaching Centre prepared for us of conditions in the Bahá'í world, based on its constant interaction with the Counsellors in the field, and from our subsequent consultations with that body. It gives us great pleasure to share with you at the outset of this conference the general features of the Plan. We invite you to turn your attention in the coming days to issues related to implementation, drawing on the insights and knowledge gained from decades of experience around the world.

Certain elements of our decisions and comments on the Plan will have a direct bearing on your labors throughout your present term of service. These are: the principal focus of the coming Plan; the process we envisage for the elaboration of the Plan and your part in this process; developments in the mode of functioning of the Continental Boards of Counsellors; the formulation of plans at the national, regional and local levels; the vital need for institutes to train believers and develop human resources; the intimate involvement of Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members in the establishment and operation of these institutes; effective approaches to the raising up and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the development of local Bahá'í communities; and the allocation of limited financial resources to the many challenges before the Bahá'í community.

At Riḍván 1996, the Bahá'ís of the world will embark on a global enterprise aimed at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and -development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community. That an advance in this process depends on the progress of all three of these intimately connected participants is abundantly clear. The next four years must witness a dramatic upsurge in effective teaching activities undertaken at the initiative of the individual. Thousands upon thousands of believers will need to be aided to express the vitality of their faith through constancy in teaching the Cause and by supporting the plans of their institutions and the endeavors of their communities. They should be helped to realize that their efforts will be sustained by the degree to which their inner life and private character “mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.” An acceleration in the tempo of individual teaching must necessarily be complemented by a multiplication in the number of regional and local teaching projects. To this end the institutions should be assisted in increasing their ability to consult according to Bahá'í principles, to unify the friends in a common vision, and to use their talents in service to the Cause. Furthermore, those who enter the Faith must be integrated into vibrant local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.

### **Planning Process**

At the close of this conference, we intend to announce to the Bahá'í world our decision to launch a Four Year Plan at Riḍván 1996. The formulation of national plans is to begin in each country after Riḍván, allowing the friends to concentrate their energies in the intervening months on bringing the Three Year Plan to a successful conclusion.

The ideas expressed in the initial announcement will be elaborated further in the forthcoming Riḍván message. Moreover, we have decided to address messages to the believers in each continent of the globe, or parts thereof, exploring the implications of the Four Year Plan in the light of the particular conditions of their countries. Following Riḍván, it should be feasible to hold consultative meetings among the institutions and with active supporters of the Faith in every country and to formulate national plans within a period of a few months. Once consultations between the Counsellors and a National Spiritual Assembly on the provisions of a plan have reached fruition, its implementation can begin. Approval of these plans from the Bahá'í World Centre will not be necessary; copies should, nonetheless, be forwarded to it.

The seven objectives specified for the Six Year and Three Year Plans describe interacting processes that must advance simultaneously over many decades. They will guide the institutions as they set goals in various areas of activity to further the aim of the Four Year Plan. National plans, however, will need to go beyond the mere enumeration of goals to include an analysis of approaches to be adopted and lines of action to be followed, so that the friends will be able to set out on their endeavors with clarity of mind and decisiveness.

### **Continental Level**

In the discharge of their vital responsibilities during the Four Year Plan, the Continental Boards of Counsellors will have a wide range of possibilities available to them. The flexibility inherent in their functioning must be fully exploited at this time when events both within and outside the Bahá'í community are moving at an accelerated rate.

Certain Counsellor functions, including the supervision and guidance of the Auxiliary Board members in an area, are generally best performed by one Counsellor on behalf of the Board. However, in the performance of other functions, there is great value in a diversity of approaches and in consultation among several Counsellors. For example, in providing stimulus to National Assemblies, in promoting teaching among various strata of the population, and in counseling different components of the Bahá'í community, better results are achieved when the abilities of a number of Counsellors are used in a complementary fashion. Further ways and means should be devised by each Continental Board of Counsellors to enable the Assemblies and communities to benefit, to the extent feasible, from the varied talents of the Counsellors. This may well involve periodic in-depth consultation among a group of Counsellors on the conditions and needs of countries in a specific part of the continent since, in general, circumstances do not allow such consultations to occur frequently among all members of the Board.

Fundamental to the work of the Counsellors is the understanding that all members of the Continental Board are responsible for the entire continent, and should, to the degree possible, endeavor to familiarize themselves with the conditions of the Cause in the countries therein. Through periodic reports from individual Counsellors, the Board is kept abreast of developments in all areas of the continent and is able to offer guidance to assist its members in the execution of their duties. Whereas no Counsellor should be regarded as having exclusive responsibility for any one territory, the detailed familiarity acquired by each through close interaction with the National Spiritual Assembly and Auxiliary Board members in a particular area is in fact a valuable asset to all the Counsellors on the Board.

Another aspect of the work of the Counsellors which merits further attention is the interaction between Counsellors of different Boards who serve adjacent areas or areas which have a special relationship. Among the examples which come to mind are the Russian Federation, located partly in Europe and partly in Asia; the circumpolar national Bahá'í communities; the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea; the communities of Northeastern Asia and the Antipodes, referred to by the Guardian as constituting a spiritual axis; the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa and the Middle East; and French-speaking territories in various continents.

We hope that, while in the Holy Land, each Board will be able to give consideration to its mode of operation and explore effective means of interaction among the Counsellors. In this way, between the close of the conference and Ridván, groups of Counsellors will be able to consult together about the planning process in a number of related countries and the role they and their auxiliaries are to play in it.

### **National and Regional Levels**

In most countries, once the major elements of the national plan have been identified, it is desirable that the planning process move quickly to the regional level. The resulting plans should include provisions for the promotion of individual teaching, the launching of campaigns of various kinds, the holding of conferences, the establishment of local and regional projects, the strengthening of local communities, and the movement of traveling teachers. Moreover, the widespread distribution of literature and audiovisual materials must be given urgent attention, and, particularly in areas of large-scale expansion, human resource development must be a key component of national and regional plans.

During the Nine Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice called upon National Spiritual Assemblies in countries where large-scale expansion was taking place to establish teaching institutes to meet the deepening needs of the thousands who were entering the Faith. At that time, the emphasis was on acquiring a physical facility to which group after group of newly enrolled believers would be invited to attend deepening courses. Over the years, in conjunction with these institutes, and often independent of them, a number of courses—referred to, for example, as weekend institutes, five-day institutes, and nine-day institutes—were developed for the purpose of helping the friends gain an understanding of the fundamental verities of the Faith and arise to serve it. These efforts have contributed significantly to the enriching of the spiritual life of the believers and will undoubtedly continue in the future.

With the growth in the number of enrollments, it has become apparent that such occasional courses of instruction and the informal activities of community life, though important, are not sufficient as a means of human resource development, for they have resulted in only a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause. These believers, no matter how dedicated, no matter how willing to make sacrifices, cannot attend to the needs of hundreds, much less thousands, of fledgling local communities. Systematic attention has to be given by Bahá'í institutions to training a significant number of believers and assisting them in serving the Cause according to their God-given talents and capacities.

The development of human resources on a large scale requires that the establishment of institutes be viewed in a new light. In many regions, it has become imperative to create institutes as organizational

structures dedicated to systematic training. The purpose of such training is to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people—adults, youth and children. This purpose can best be achieved through well-organized, formal programs consisting of courses that follow appropriately designed curricula.

As an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly, the training institute should be charged with the task of developing human resources in all or part of a country. The requirements of expansion and consolidation in the country or region will dictate the complexity of its organization. In some instances, the institute may consist of a group of dedicated believers with a well-defined program and some administrative arrangement that enables it to offer regular training courses. In many cases, in addition to a group of teachers associated with it, the institute will require part- and full-time staff, for whom assistance from the funds of the Faith may be necessary. The institute needs access to some physical facilities in which it can conduct courses and, at some stage of its development, may require a building of its own. Irrespective of whether or not an institute has its own physical facilities, its teachers must offer courses both at a central location and in the villages and towns so that an appreciable number of believers can enter its programs. The complexity and number of courses offered by an institute, as well as the size of its staff and the pool of teachers from which it draws, may call for the appointment of a board to direct its affairs. When the region under the influence of an institute is large, it may have branches serving specific areas, each with its own administration.

For the new thrust in the establishment of institutes to succeed, the active involvement of the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members in their operation is essential. Such involvement will help the Counsellors to kindle “the Fire of the Love of God in the very hearts and souls of His servants,” “to diffuse the Divine Fragrances,” “to edify the souls of men,” “to promote learning,” and “to improve the character of all men.” These institutes will provide the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members with immediate access to a formal means of educating the believers, in addition to other avenues available to them such as conferences, summer schools, and meetings with the friends. Institutes should be regarded as centers of learning, and since their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exercise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members, we have decided that intimate involvement in institute operations should now become a part of the evolving functions of these officers of the Faith. The Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies will need to consult on the details of the collaboration between the two arms of the Administrative Order in overseeing the budget and functioning of an institute and in planning program content, developing curricula, and delivering courses. If a board of directors is named, its membership should be decided upon by the National Spiritual Assembly in consultation with the Counsellors and with their full support; Auxiliary Board members may serve on these bodies.

In addition to having a working relationship with Auxiliary Board members, the institute must necessarily collaborate closely with Local Assemblies and committees in charge of administering plans and projects of expansion and consolidation. This will ensure that the institute’s programs are designed to help raise up individuals who can contribute effectively to such plans. However, even if these administrative bodies have

not yet developed the capacity to utilize the talents of those being trained, the programs of the institute should be regularly carried out. After all, the strengthening of the institutions in a region depends, as do all other matters, on skilled and confirmed supporters of the Faith.

In developing its programs, the institute should draw on the talents of a growing number of believers and should also take advantage of its institutional links to have access to resources worldwide. A newly established institute will often utilize materials created by institutes in other parts of the world. Gradually, those designing and delivering courses will learn how these materials might be supplemented to better suit their specific needs and will decide what new ones should be created. The curriculum of the institute at any given time, then, may well use a combination of materials created locally and those that have proven successful elsewhere. As institutes begin to flourish, a wide variety of curricula will be developed for various training needs. We hope that, with the assistance of the International Teaching Centre, you will be able to assess the materials available from time to time and help the institutes in the communities you serve to select those most appropriate for their needs.

We are placing at the disposal of the Teaching Centre funds specifically designated for the operation of institutes and intend to call on National Spiritual Assemblies, according to their circumstances, to pay particular attention to the development of institutes in their countries. It is our hope that significant progress in this direction will constitute one of the distinguishing features of the Four Year Plan.

### **Local Level**

The development of the local community and the functioning of the Local Spiritual Assembly have been ongoing challenges to the Bahá'í world through successive Plans. At present, a few thousand Local Spiritual Assemblies have attained at least a basic level of functioning. National and regional plans will clearly have to include provision for the adoption by such Assemblies of local plans of expansion and consolidation. To ensure that local plans contribute to the advancement of the process of entry by troops, you will need to call upon your Auxiliary Board members and their assistants to work closely with these Assemblies, both in the formulation of plans and in their execution, helping them to shoulder the responsibility of systematic growth in their own communities and in localities adopted as extension goals. The community must become imbued with a sense of mission and the Assembly grow in awareness of its role as a channel of God's grace not only for the Bahá'ís but for the entire village, town or city in which it serves.

However, in those many communities where no organized activities are taking place, whether or not a Local Spiritual Assembly has been elected, more basic challenges have to be addressed, and in this the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants must play a fundamental role. Concerted effort must be made to help the individual believers, men and women alike, increase their love for Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause and to bring them together in the Nineteen Day Feast as well as periodic meetings aimed at raising their awareness of their identity as a community. In those localities where the participation of women in community affairs is lagging, determined steps have to be taken to foster such participation. Effective measures have to be adopted so that the Local Spiritual Assembly is properly elected year after year and consistent progress in its functioning is made. The regular holding of Bahá'í children's classes should be given high priority. Indeed in many parts of the world this is the first activity in a process of community



building, which, if pursued vigorously, gives rise to the other developments. In all this, particular attention needs to be given to the youth, who are often the Faith's most enthusiastic supporters. The establishment of these activities defines a first stage in the process of community development, which, once attained, must be followed by subsequent stages until a community reaches a point where it can formulate its own plans of expansion and consolidation.

In this context, we feel that the Auxiliary Board members should take further advantage of the possibility of naming, where appropriate, more than one assistant to a given community, with the intention of assigning each to promote one or more of these fundamental community activities. We also urge you to consult with National Spiritual Assemblies on the experience of past endeavors to assist such communities.

Arrangements can then be made for the lessons learned from this experience to be discussed with the active supporters of the Faith in each region, helping them to identify the approaches and methods applicable to their specific conditions and to set in motion a systematic process of community development. This process should be one in which the friends review their successes and difficulties, adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward unhesitatingly.

In general, we feel the functions of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection have to be clarified and their influence augmented. The deepening of the friends and the proper functioning of the Local Spiritual Assembly are essential to the healthy growth of the community and should be important concerns of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection. We are contemplating an increase in the membership of Protection Boards to make the number equal to that of the Propagation Boards. It is our hope that Protection Board members will, in turn, name more assistants to focus on issues related to community development.

### **Election of Local Spiritual Assemblies**

In developing the Administrative Order, the Guardian established the First Day of Riḍván as the day when all Local Spiritual Assemblies should be elected. During his own lifetime, this practice was followed as the number of Local Assemblies steadily grew to over one thousand.

In the subsequent two decades the Faith expanded greatly, especially in the rural areas of the world, often remote and difficult to reach. In view of this development, the Universal House of Justice decided in 1977 that, in certain cases, when the local friends failed to elect their Spiritual Assembly on the First Day of Riḍván, they could do so on any subsequent day of the Riḍván Festival. This permission did not apply to all localities, but to those that, in the judgment of the National Spiritual Assembly, were particularly affected by such factors as illiteracy, remoteness, and unfamiliarity with concepts of Bahá'í Administration. The House of Justice also gave permission at the beginning of the Five Year Plan for Assemblies being formed for the first time to be elected at any point during the year.

These provisions have enabled the believers in a large number of localities to receive assistance in electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and much experience has been gained in strengthening Local Assemblies under diverse conditions in a vast array of cultural settings. Nevertheless, in principle, the initiative and responsibility for electing a Local Spiritual Assembly belong primarily to the Bahá'ís in the locality, and

assistance from outside is ultimately fruitful only if the friends become conscious of this sacred responsibility. As progress is made in the training of human resources and in the development of the entire range of Bahá'í community life, the capacity of the friends to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies on their own will certainly grow.

With these thoughts in mind, we have decided that, beginning at Ridván 1997, the practice of electing all Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Ridván will be reinstituted. We recognize that the immediate result may be a reduction in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies at Ridván 1997, but we are confident that subsequent years will witness a steady increase.

The National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies on the one hand, and the Counsellors and their auxiliaries on the other, clearly have a duty to foster the establishment and development of Bahá'í communities, including their divinely ordained local institutions. This duty can be discharged mainly through sustained educational programs which create in the believers the awareness of the importance of the Teachings in every area of their individual and social lives and which engender in them the desire and determination to elect and support their Local Spiritual Assemblies. These programs should take full advantage of the provision that has been made for the temporary formation of administrative committees of three or more members in localities where Local Assemblies are not elected, or where the members of a Local Assembly fail to meet.

### **Financial Needs**

The magnitude of the tasks the Bahá'í community is being summoned to perform during the Four Year Plan will call for a considerable outlay of funds. The pressing demands of the Arc Projects will continue to place severe constraints on the International Funds of the Faith. Yet, the Universal House of Justice will do its utmost to make available to the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies the financial means necessary for the discharge of the tasks of expansion and consolidation in areas requiring assistance. This will include funds for the all-important work of the Auxiliary Boards.

As experience has shown, however, the expenditure of money does not, by itself, bring results. The challenge before you is to help develop in the various institutions and agencies involved in the execution of the Plan the capacity to expend funds in a judicious and effective manner. In addition, you must redouble your efforts to educate every member of the Bahá'í community—the new and the old believer, the youth and the adult—on the spiritual significance of contributing to the Fund. We are confident that you will give special attention to this twofold challenge as you set out to help the friends in every continent to win victories for the Cause during these crucial years in the history of humanity.

Dear Friends, the few short years that separate us from the close of the century are a period of both spiritual potency and immense opportunity. Great responsibilities rest on your shoulders. During the first months of the Plan you will be making a decisive contribution to the formulation of plans that will inspire the friends to action and will guide them in their individual and collective endeavors. Throughout the Plan, you and your auxiliaries will encourage the friends, stimulate the spiritual powers latent in their hearts, and assist them in fulfilling their duties towards a Cause so dear to them. As you take up these manifold

tasks, you must constantly bear in mind that the realization of the aim of the Four Year Plan will depend on the rapid increase in the number of teachers of the Cause who will bring in the multitudes, nurture them, and infuse in them “so deep a longing” as to impel them “to arise independently” and devote their energies “to the quickening of other souls.”

Be assured that we will remember each and all of you in the Holy Shrines.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

## **The Universal House of Justice**

26 December 1995

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

Beloved Friends,

With great happiness we welcome you to this momentous conference, which is graced by the presence of three Hands of the Cause of God. It marks the opening of a period of intense activity as the twentieth century, hailed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "a century of life and renewal," draws to a close, and a new century of enormous challenge for all mankind opens before us. To guide the activities of the Bahá'í world during this period, we have decided to launch a Four Year Plan at Ridván 1996. The provisions of that Plan are to be the focus of your consultations in the coming six days.

The Continental Boards of Counselors have been an integral part of the Administrative Order for over twenty-five years. Your institution has made an essential contribution to the strengthening and evolution of the Bahá'í community, and your role in the protection and growth of the Cause will be of even greater consequence in the years ahead.

If there is any question of the speed with which history is unfolding, we need but recall the events, both within and without the Bahá'í community, which have transpired since the Counselors assembled in conference in 1985. The transformations of this remarkable first decade of the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith, seen in the light of the promises in our Sacred Scriptures, throw into sharp perspective the great range of the tasks before us. Can we have any doubt that events will henceforth move at a still more rapid pace and will change the world even more radically than have those of the past decade?

At this crucial point in the fortunes of humankind, your role and that of your Auxiliaries in calling forth the wholehearted endeavors of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, in raising the level of their spiritual awareness, and in promoting the evolution of national and local Bahá'í institutions is of fundamental importance. In that realization we eagerly anticipate the fruits of your deliberations during the coming days. We shall offer fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold that the confirmations of the Almighty will guide and reinforce your services both now and through the years to come.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Universal House of Justice

31 December 1995

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

In the wake of the dynamic spirit animating the six-day-long Counselors' Conference at the World Center, now in its final session as we address you, we take the occasion to announce our decision which has been the subject of their deliberations: At Riḍván 1996 a global plan of expansion and consolidation will be launched, to end four years later at Riḍván 2000.

It is this anticipation that has focused the thoughts of the seventy-eight Counselors from the five continents, who have been conferring together in the presence of the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the members of the Universal House of Justice and the Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre. Their consultations on the challenges and prospects facing the Bahá'í world community have been of such caliber and content as to have emboldened our expectations of a mighty thrust in the growth and development of that community during the crucial years immediately ahead.

The whole Plan will be announced at Riḍván. However, we wish you to have some information about it now within the measure of the discussions which have been taking place at the Counselors' Conference.

The Four Year Plan will aim at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community. Keen attention to all three will ensure a greatly expanded, visibly united, vibrant and cohesive international community by the end of the twentieth century. The basic requisites can be summarized as follows.

The first calls for a vitality of the faith of each believer that is expressed through personal initiative and constancy in teaching the Cause to others, and through conscientious, individual effort to provide energy and resources to upbuild the community, to uphold the authority of its institutions, and to support local and regional plans and teaching projects. The second requires that local and national Bahá'í institutions evolve more rapidly into a proper exercise of their responsibilities as channels of guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. The third, the flourishing of the community especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.

Towards these ends, the work of the Continental Counselors must assume new dimensions. Thus, at their conference, they have been deliberating on such matters as:

1. Developments in the mode of the functioning of the Continental Boards of Counselors.
2. The process for the elaboration of the Plan through the formulation of derivative plans and strategies at the national, regional, and local levels. Joint consultations between the Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies will begin immediately after

Riḍván, and the planning process will move quickly to the regional level, involving Auxiliary Board members, Local Spiritual Assemblies and committees.

3. The development of human resources to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding community. Large-scale growth necessitates sustained measures of consolidation. The urgent requirement is for formally conducted programs of training through institutes and other centers of learning, in the establishment and operation of which the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members will become more intimately involved.
4. Effective approaches to the raising up and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies. In accordance with the objective of fostering the maturation of these Assemblies, a greater effort is required to uphold a vital principle, which is that the responsibility for electing a Local Spiritual Assembly rests primarily on the Bahá'ís in the locality. The Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are to increase their efforts to improve the general understanding of this principle and will devote more attention to assisting the development of Local Assemblies. As of Riḍván 1997, all Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world will have to be elected on the First Day of Riḍván.
5. Further means for the development of local Bahá'í communities. The needs in this respect will be met in part by an immediate increase in the membership of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection to equal that of the Auxiliary Boards for Propagation, so that Protection Board members can directly and systematically assist on a wide scale the fundamental activities of the community, such as the spiritual nurturing of individual believers, the participation of women in all aspects of community life, the observance of the Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days, the holding of children's classes, the fostering of youth activities.

The seven objectives specified in previous Plans describe essential, interacting directions that must advance simultaneously into the foreseeable future. The Four Year Plan's aim at accelerating the process of entry by troops identifies a necessity at this stage in the progress of the Cause and in the state of human society. With this perspective, the three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order—the individual, the institutions, and the community—must now demonstrate more tangibly than ever before their capacity and willingness to embrace masses of new adherents, to effect the spiritual and administrative transformation of thousands upon thousands, and, above all, to multiply the army of knowledgeable, consecrated teachers of a Faith whose emergence from obscurity must be registered on the consciousness of countless multitudes throughout the earth. These are among the detailed considerations that have occupied the deliberations of the Continental Counselors, who, upon their return home and in the course of their work, will have occasion to share the results of their conference with the friends.

An auspicious beginning for the new Plan will largely depend on the results of the current one, which will end in just a few months. The adequacy of these results will owe much to the degree to which the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the friends carry out the directions of their National Spiritual Assemblies, the generals of every Plan. Time is slipping away. This reality should prod us all to maximum action. Hence, in

preparation for what beckons us on the near horizon, we cannot, we must not, hesitate to expend every energy to bring the Three Year Plan to a successful conclusion. The urgency which intensifies our desire for such an outcome is not merely pride of victory, gratifying as that may be. There are divine deadlines to be met. Our work is intended not only to increase the size and consolidate the foundations of our community, but more particularly to exert a positive influence on the affairs of the entire human race. At so crucial a moment in world affairs, we must not fail in our duty to take timely action on the goals set before us in the Three Year Plan.

With the full fervor of our expectant hearts, we call upon you all, individually and collectively, to arise to the summons of the Lord of Hosts to teach His Cause. Do so with love, faith and courage; and the doors of heaven will open wide to pour forth benedictions upon your efforts.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]