

MESSAGES
FROM THE
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1986-2001

THE FOURTH EPOCH
OF THE
FORMATIVE AGE

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FORMATIVE AGE



Bahá'í
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2000–2001

The Twelve Month Plan

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Foreword

The early years of the history of the Bahá'í Faith are defined by Shoghi Effendi as the Heroic Age, an age that began with the Báb's declaration of His divine mission in 1844 and continued through the ministries of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was an age characterized by vicious persecution of the Faith's twin Prophet-Founders and Their followers. It was a time of hardship but also of glory, for the brightness of dawn dispelled the dark of night, and Bahá'u'lláh's voluminous writings set forth the pathway to a divine civilization that would ensure peace and prosperity for all by offering the means for individual spiritual transformation and the final unification of human society. Bahá'u'lláh urged the kings and rulers of His time to recognize and partake of this gift. None heeded His call, assuring that He would not see His own promises realized in His lifetime. After Bahá'u'lláh's passing, the small community of believers was entrusted with bringing His world order into reality.

To build a new world order would be a hopeless task indeed had Bahá'u'lláh not given His followers a means to ensure its realization. In His will and testament He established a Covenant, unprecedented in religious history, that would protect and shelter the Bahá'ís by preserving the continuity of divine authority through a never-ending link to God's will for humanity. Through this Covenant Bahá'u'lláh passed leadership of the Bahá'í community to His eldest son and appointed successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in turn perpetuated this Covenant by designating, in his will and testament, the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as his successors.

With 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in 1921, the sun set on the Heroic Age of the Faith, and a new age began: the Formative Age, an age destined to precede and prepare the way for the Golden Age of the Most Great Peace, the emergence of a global commonwealth, and the fulfillment of Bahá'u'lláh's holy vision of the oneness of humankind.

During the Formative Age, the strength of the Covenant would not only protect the Faith from schism but also provide for its florescence. Upon Shoghi Effendi, his eldest grandson, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the mantle of the Guardian of the Cause of God. Under his leadership during the First Epoch of the Formative Age, spanning the years 1921 to 1946, the seeds of the Bahá’í Administrative Order that Bahá’u’lláh had planted and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had carefully nurtured began to sprout. Guided by the Guardian, the Bahá’í community established the primary stages of its expansion—slowly building in all continents the local and national institutions that would facilitate the spread of the Faith to the entire world through the execution of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. That Plan was the blueprint carried forward by Shoghi Effendi as he initiated the first of many systematic teaching plans implemented and carried out during his stewardship of the worldwide Bahá’í community. These successive plans, beginning with the first Seven Year Plan in 1937, were directed at establishing Bahá’í communities in every country in the Western Hemisphere and deepening the roots of already existing communities.

These teaching plans continued throughout the Second Epoch of the Formative Age (1946–63), culminating in the Ten Year World Crusade from 1953 to 1963, which summoned the twelve existing National Spiritual Assemblies to unite in a focused effort to spread the Faith to all corners of the globe. The Crusade opened 131 new countries to the Faith, achieving a complementary increase in the diversity of the Bahá’í community and expanding the number of National Assemblies to fifty-six. These successes were matched by the evolution of the Administrative Order and the simultaneous development of the Faith’s World Center in Haifa. Auxiliary Boards were introduced and the International Bahá’í Council was established. The Hands of the Cause of God, an institution created by Bahá’u’lláh, came into its own through the appointment to its ranks of souls of remarkable character and capacity, to carry out its purpose of propagating the Faith of God and protecting its unity.

Shoghi Effendi’s unexpected death midway through the Crusade in 1957, however, deprived the Bahá’ís of their source of divine guidance and their beloved Guardian. At this moment of despair, the Hands of the Cause of God, whom Shoghi Effendi called the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth,” heroically arose to lead the community to complete the plan laid out by Shoghi Effendi and to establish the Universal

House of Justice, the second of the “Twin Successors” of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The House of Justice, whose members Bahá’u’lláh described as the “Trustees of the All-Merciful” and the “Deputies of God,” was now entrusted with the fulfillment of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant with humanity that His guidance would never cease. The Second Epoch closed with an International Bahá’í Convention that summoned the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies from around the globe to elect the first Universal House of Justice.

The international Bahá’í community, with the Universal House of Justice now at its helm, entered the Third Epoch of the Formative Age (1963–86), a span that would take it through the next twenty-three years. Those years witnessed a growing maturation of Bahá’í administration and of the abilities of Bahá’í communities, the creation of the Continental Boards of Counselors and the International Teaching Center, and the continuing development of the Auxiliary Boards. The Third Epoch called the Bahá’ís of the world to a higher level of functioning that would be consistent with expected vast increases in the community’s size and diversity, its emergence as a model to humankind, and the extension of its influence. Indeed, the Third Epoch witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the number of adherents to the Faith. It also introduced the community to pursuing projects of social and economic development, thereby signaling readiness for a profound advance in both its scope of activity and the concomitant sense of its own identity. The injunction of the Universal House of Justice at the opening of the Epoch—that the Bahá’ís, through study of the Word of God and dedicated service, “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”—was bearing precious fruit.

The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age was proclaimed by the Universal House of Justice in a letter to the Bahá’ís of the World dated 2 January 1986, its inception marked by a “new development in the maturation of Bahá’í institutions.” The overall aims and characteristics of the ensuing Plan were to be established by the Universal House of Justice, but for the first time it was stated that “national goals of the next Plan are to be largely formulated by National Spiritual Assemblies and Boards of Counselors.” The Six Year Plan that followed (1986–1992) included among its main objectives the vast expansion of the numerical and financial resources of the Cause, increased availability and use of Bahá’í literature, a worldwide demonstration of the

Bahá'í way of life with a focus on education of children and youth, extended involvement in the needs of the world, and the pursuit of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities. This was followed by the Three Year Plan (1993–96); the momentous Four Year Plan (1996–2000); and the Twelve Month Plan (2000–2001), which propelled the Bahá'í community into the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age.

Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001: The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age offers a collection of messages from this period that tells a compelling story of a religious community maturing internally while externally emerging further from obscurity and solidifying its reputation in the world as a community concerned with unity, peace, and justice for all humanity. The closing years of the twentieth century were a period of tremendous turbulence in the world, witnessing upheavals of nations and peoples worldwide. The Bahá'í Faith penetrated parts of the world long closed off to Bahá'u'lláh's healing message, and the people of those countries joined in the dedicated application of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in society. The disorder and chaos in the world appeared in sharp relief to the hard-won victories and joyful triumphs of a community clearly in the ascendant.

This volume compiles letters, cables, telexes, and electronic messages sent to Bahá'í institutions and individuals. The patient and loving guidance of the Universal House of Justice is evident in all of the correspondence here as it advises and comments on matters of personal morality and social responsibility, tackling such subjects as nonviolence in families, sexual morality, the nature of Bahá'í elections, and the Covenant. Readers will also find guidance on publishing, on Bahá'í scholarship, on presenting Bahá'í perspectives in public fora and on the Internet, and on cooperating with international organizations, as well as strong statements on issues such as apartheid, individual rights and freedoms, and the necessity of protecting the environment. Throughout the volume, one tragic thread passing through the narrative is the severe persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, whose members were oppressed, harassed, arrested, and even executed for their religious beliefs. The Fourth Epoch also saw the momentous occasion of the Holy Year commemorating the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing and the inauguration of His Covenant. This anniversary was marked not only with two historic international gatherings but also with the publication of the English translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, whose laws will form the basis for the promised Golden Age. Other

notable results and achievements were the inauguration and steady progress, despite financial hardship, of the Mount Carmel Projects to erect edifices for the administration of the Faith at its World Center and to set off the Shrine of the Báb within a series of terraced gardens stretching from the foot of Mount Carmel to its summit. The outward signs of these physical structures were paralleled by the continued development of the functioning of the Auxiliary Boards, the Continental Boards of Counselors, and the International Teaching Center; by a steady increase in the number of National Spiritual Assemblies; and by the inauguration in 1997 of the institution of the Regional Bahá'í Council in many countries. Also chronicled here are evidences of increasingly effective engagement with the wider community, from the local through international levels, on critical matters of the day.

Beyond these stellar achievements, the Fourth Epoch will be remembered in Bahá'í history as the period in which the Universal House of Justice led the Bahá'í world to a new stage in its collective effort to achieve the long-sought goal of systematic, large-scale, and sustainable expansion and consolidation. In announcing the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), it wrote: “The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude.” The rapid evolution of the Bahá'í community in the ensuing years amply justifies this assertion. The new phase of evolution grew out of the experience of the preceding three decades, during which victories in the teaching work around the globe vastly expanded the Bahá'í community but also proved to be unsustainable and unable to bring into being capable local Bahá'í communities. Experience was demonstrating the need for systematic, widespread, and formal training for the purpose of raising up “large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.” Expansion and consolidation could thereby become reciprocal parts of one self-sustaining process. In its *Riḍván* message to the Bahá'ís around the world, the Universal House of Justice called for the development of a “network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted.” The single aim of the Four Year Plan was a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. The individual, the community, and the Bahá'í institutions were each called upon to play their unique part. The training institute for the systematic development of human resources was to become the engine for this process.

It would be almost ten years later, in December 2005, that the Universal House of Justice would announce that the “elements required for a

FOREWORD

concerted effort to infuse the diverse regions of the world with the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation have crystallized into a framework for action that now needs only to be exploited." The messages in this volume presage the gradual emergence of each of those elements and document the foundational steps on which this framework rests.

—NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

List of Abbreviations

ABC	<i>Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada</i>
ABL	<i>Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i>
ADJ	<i>The Advent of Divine Justice</i>
ALNZ	<i>Arohani: Letters to New Zealand</i>
BA	<i>Bahá'í Administration</i>
BP	<i>Bahá'í Prayers, 2002 U.S. ed.</i>
BWF	<i>Bahá'í World Faith</i>
CC	<i>Compilation of Compilations, vol. 1</i>
CC2	<i>Compilation of Compilations, vol. 2</i>
CC3	<i>Compilation of Compilations, vol. 3</i>
CF	<i>Citadel of Faith</i>
CUHJ	<i>Constitution of the Universal House of Justice</i>
DB	<i>The Dawn-Breakers</i>
DG	<i>Directives from the Guardian</i>
DND	<i>Dawn of a New Day</i>
ESW	<i>Epistle to Son of the Wolf</i>
GPB	<i>God Passes By</i>
GWB	<i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
HE	<i>High Endeavors: Messages to Alaska</i>
HW	<i>The Hidden Words</i>
JTA	<i>Japan Will Turn Ablaze</i>
KA	<i>The Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
KI	<i>The Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
LDG	<i>The Light of Divine Guidance</i>
LG	<i>Lights of Guidance</i>
LGANZ	<i>Letters of the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand</i>
MA	<i>Messages to America</i>
MBW	<i>Messages to the Bahá'í World</i>
MC	<i>Messages to Canada</i>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MIS	<i>Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957</i>
MUHJ	<i>Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986</i>
PDC	<i>The Promised Day Is Come</i>
PEBT	<i>Promoting Entry by Troops</i>
PM	<i>Prayers and Meditations</i>
PUP	<i>The Promulgation of Universal Peace</i>
SAQ	<i>Some Answered Questions</i>
SDC	<i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i>
SH	<i>Suriy-i-Haykal, in Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
SWAB	<i>Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá</i>
SWB	<i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i>
TB	<i>Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh</i>
TDH	<i>This Decisive Hour</i>
TDP	<i>Tablets of the Divine Plan</i>
UD	<i>Unfolding Destiny</i>
WOB	<i>World Order of Bahá’u’lláh</i>
WT	<i>Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá</i>

Epochs of the Heroic Age

1844–1853

The First Epoch

The Bábí Dispensation

1853–1892

The Second Epoch

The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh

1892–1921

The Third Epoch

The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Epochs of the Formative Age

1921–1944/46

The First Epoch

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1921–1936 | Period of Preparation |
| 1937–1944 | The first Seven Year Plan of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada |
| 1944–1946 | Consolidation of Victories |

1946–1963

The Second Epoch

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1946–1953 | The second Seven Year Plan of the Bahá'ís of the United States and plans of varying duration pursued by nine other regional and national Bahá'í communities (Canada; Central America and South America; Australia and New Zealand; India, Pakistan, and Burma; the British Isles; Germany and Austria; Persia; Egypt; Iraq) |
| 1953–1963 | The Ten Year World Crusade |

1963–1986

The Third Epoch

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 1963–1964 | Year of Preparation |
| 1964–1973 | Nine Year Plan |
| 1973–1974 | Year of Preparation |
| 1974–1979 | Five Year Plan |
| 1979–1986 | Seven Year Plan |

1986–2001
The Fourth Epoch

1986–1992	Six Year Plan
1992–1993	Holy Year Commemorating the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and the Inauguration of His Covenant
1993–1996	Three Year Plan
1996–2000	Four Year Plan
2000–2001	Twelve Month Plan

2001–
The Fifth Epoch

2001–2006	Five Year Plan
2006–2011	Five Year Plan

The Fourth Epoch

Significant Milestones, Anniversaries, and Events

Milestones

Riḍván 1986	Beginning of the Six Year Plan
Riḍván 1992	End of the Six Year Plan Beginning of the Holy Year Commemorating the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and the Inauguration of His Covenant
Riḍván 1993	Beginning of the Three Year Plan
Riḍván 1996	End of the Three Year Plan Beginning of the Four Year Plan
Riḍván 2000	End of the Four Year Plan Beginning of the Twelve Month Plan
Riḍván 2001	End of the Twelve Month Plan Beginning of the Five Year Plan

Significant Anniversaries

1987–1988	Seventy-fifth anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West
April 1987	Fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the first Seven Year Plan
November 1992	Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh
April 1993	Fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Ten Year Crusade

Significant Events

- May 1986 Martyrdom of three Bahá'ís in Iran
Increase in number of Auxiliary Board members to 756
- June 1986 Execution of a Bahá'í in Iran
- August 1986 Visit of Prime Minister of the Cook Islands to the Bahá'í World Center, the first head of state to formally consult with the Universal House of Justice
- October 1986 Murder of two Bahá'ís in Iran
Release of statement on apartheid
- December 1986 Dedication of the House of Worship in New Delhi
- January 1987 First International Conference on Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Haifa
Execution of a Bahá'í in Iran
Release of a compilation on trustworthiness
- March 1987 Execution of two Bahá'ís in Iran
By-election to replace one member of the Universal House of Justice
The establishment of Africa's first Bahá'í radio station, in Liberia
Release of a codification of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh
- April 1987 Signing of status agreement between the Bahá'í World Center and the government of Israel
- June 1987 Release of a statement on the Bahá'í education of children
- August 1987 Announcement of inauguration of the Mount Carmel Projects overseeing the completion of three remaining Arc buildings and the terraces surrounding the Shrine of the Báb
- October 1987 Two Bahá'ís executed in Iran, five others arrested, including two members of the former National Spiritual Assembly

- October 1987 Release of a compilation on crisis and victory
- November 1987 Bahá'í Faith joins the Network on Conservation and Religion of the World Wide Fund for Nature
- December 1987 Release of compilation on the Covenant
- Riḍván 1988 Convening the Sixth International Bahá'í Convention and election of the Universal House of Justice
- May 1988 Purchase of land adjacent to the Guardian's resting place
- Appointment of new members of International Teaching Center and increase of membership to nine
- September 1988 Release of a compilation on a chaste and holy life
- December 1988 Execution of two Bahá'ís in Iran
- Letter of the Universal House of Justice outlining individual rights and freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh
- March 1989 Announcement of worldwide network of Deputies and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh
- Riḍván 1989 Formation of new National Spiritual Assemblies in Macau and Guinea-Bissau
- Reestablishment of Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Ishqábád
- October 1989 Appointment of first European Bahá'í Youth Council
- Release of a compilation on conservation of the earth's resources
- Creation of an Office of the Environment of the Bahá'í International Community
- December 1989 Release of a compilation on Bahá'í elections
- January 1990 Official approval of town planning scheme for Mount Carmel Projects

- January 1990 Settlement of pioneers in Sakhalin Island, the final territorial goal of the Ten Year Crusade
- February 1990 Establishment of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland
- Riḍván 1990 Launch of subsidiary Two Year Plan for former Eastern Bloc countries
- Election of first Local Spiritual Assembly of Cluj, Romania, the first Assembly in a former Eastern Bloc country
- May 1990 Commencement of Phase One of Mount Carmel Projects, beginning of extension of terraces surrounding the Shrine of the Báb
- June 1990 Completion of restoration of the North Wing of the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá
- September 1990 Release of a compilation on teaching prominent people
- November 1990 Formation of twenty-three new Local Spiritual Assemblies in former Eastern Bloc countries
- Increase in number of Auxiliary Board members to 846
- December 1990 Suspension of pilgrimage program due to war in the Middle East
- 1991 Establishment of an Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the Bahá'í World Center
- February 1991 Granting of registration and legal incorporation of Local Spiritual Assemblies by Federal Constitutional Court of Germany
- April 1991 Publication of a statement on Bahá'u'lláh
- Riḍván 1991 Formation of four new National Spiritual Assemblies (Czechoslovakia, Romania, the West Leeward Islands, and the USSR)
- June 1991 Commencement of Phase Two of the Mount Carmel Projects

- March 1992 Execution of a Bahá'í in Iran
- Riḍván 1992 Close of the Six Year Plan
- Formation of eight new National Spiritual Assemblies (Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Hungary, Greenland, and Poland) and two new Regional Spiritual Assemblies (Central Asia and Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova)
- Change of the National Spiritual Assembly of the USSR to the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia, and Armenia
- Reestablishment of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Congo Republic and Niger
- Announcement of the universal application of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh
- May 1992 Inauguration of the Holy Year
- Gathering at the Bahá'í World Center to commemorate the centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh
- June 1992 Release of a compilation on proclaiming the Faith through mass media
- Desecration of a Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran
- Murder of a Bahá'í in Iran
- September 1992 Two imprisoned Iranian Bahá'ís sentenced to death
- Confiscation of Bahá'í homes and other properties in Iran
- November 1992 Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City
- December 1992 Establishment of an Office for the Advancement of Women by the Bahá'í International Community
- Initiation of Phase Three of the Mount Carmel Projects

- March 1993 Publication of the annotated English translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*
- Riḍván 1993 Launch of the Three Year Plan
- Convening of the Seventh International Bahá'í Convention and election of the Universal House of Justice
- May 1993 Appointment of International Teaching Center members
- June 1993 Visit to the Bahá'í World Center of Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea
- October 1993 Reformat and relaunch of the annual *Bahá'í World* volumes
- November 1993 Release of a compilation on entry by troops
- December 1993 Commencement of construction of the Center for the Study of the Sacred Texts
- March 1994 Murder of three Iranian pioneers in Ciskei
- April 1994 Five continental conferences of National Bahá'í Youth Committees
- Riḍván 1994 Formation of six new National Spiritual Assemblies (Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Slovenia and Croatia
- Change of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia to the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkmenistan
- May 1994 Official version of Bahá'í Sacred Writings made available electronically
- July 1994 Visit to the Bahá'í World Center of the President of the Seychelles
- December 1994 Commencement of construction of International Teaching Center

- January 1995 Release of the statement *The Prosperity of Humankind* at the World Summit for Social Development
- February 1995 Release of a compilation on Bahá'í scholarship
- March 1995 Tenth anniversary of Universidad Núr
- April 1995 Preparation for completion of lower terraces on Mount Carmel
- Riḍván 1995 Formation of five new National Spiritual Assemblies (Armenia, Belarus, Eritrea, Georgia, and Sicily)
- Change of Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia, and Armenia to National Spiritual Assembly of the Russian Federation and the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova to the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine and Moldova
- Merging of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa, and Transkei under one National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa
- October 1995 Increase in number of Continental Counselors to 81
- December 1995 Publication of Persian edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas
- Announcement of changes in role and function of Continental Boards of Counselors leading up to Four Year Plan
- Clarification of function of training institutes in developing human resources
- Riḍván 1996 Conclusion of Three Year Plan and launch of the Four Year Plan
- Formation of two new National Spiritual Assemblies (São Tomé and Príncipe and Moldova) and change of Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine and Moldova to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine

- August 1996 Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in Brazil
- January 1997 Four Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran Sentenced to Death
- March 1997 Acquisition of Property for Terraces on Mount Carmel
- May 1997 Formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils
- August 1997 Martyrdom of Two Bahá'ís in Iran
- February 1998 Formation of three new National Spiritual Assemblies (Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia) and reformation of one National Spiritual Assembly (Liberia) and change of Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Republics to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Czech Republic
- May 1998 Two Bahá'ís in Iran sentenced to prison
- Riḍván 1998 Convening of the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention and the election of the Universal House of Justice
- July 1998 Twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the International Teaching Center
- Execution of Bahá'í in Iran
- Visit by representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations to the Pacific Islands
- Imprisonment of four Bahá'ís in Iran
- August 1998 Release of a compilation on the arts
- Continued persecution by the Iranian government of Bahá'ís in Iran
- September 1998 Arrests, imprisonment, and confiscation of property of Bahá'ís in Iran
- Two Bahá'ís in Iran sentenced to death

- February 1999 Release of a document to commemorate the end of the twentieth century
- October 1999 Martyrdom of Bahá'í in Tajikistan
- December 1999 Interfaith gathering in India in the presence of Pope John Paul II
- January 2000 Passing of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum
- February 2000 Three Bahá'ís in Iran sentenced to death
Registration of Bahá'í marriages in Iran
- March 2000 By-election to replace one member of the Universal House of Justice
- Riḍván 2000 Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Associations of Bahá'í Studies
Restoration of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia
- May 2000 Release of Bahá'í prisoners in Iran
Release of publication on obligatory prayer and fasting
- November 2000 Revision of codification of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh
- January 2001 Inauguration of the International Teaching Center Building on Mount Carmel
Publication by the Universal House of Justice of the document entitled *The Institution of the Counsellors*
- April 2001 Publication of *Century of Light*

1986–1992

The Six Year Plan

1

Martyrdom of Three Bahá'ís in Iran

12 MAY 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH HEAVY HEARTS ANNOUNCE MARTYRDOM THREE VALIANT SOULS IRANIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. MR. SIRRU'LLÁH VAĤDAT-NIĤÁMÍ 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. 1.1

THE THIRD VICTIM, FIFTEEN YEAR OLD PAYMÁN SUBHÁNÍ WAS TAKEN TOGETHER WITH HIS FATHER RÚĤU'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 CLIFE 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. 1.2

THESE CRIMES AFTER RELATIVE QUIET PERIOD IN IRAN HAVE CAUSED CONCERN SAFETY, WELL-BEING IRANIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. . . . 1.3

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

2

Assignments of the Continental Boards of Counselors

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. 2.1

As from last Riḍvân, 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 Ilhan Sezgin is, 2.2

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.

2.3 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 Number	Number Added	New Number
Africa	Protection	81	9	90
	Propagation	99	9	108
Americas	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
Total		702	54	756
Total Protection		297	27	324
Total Propagation		405	27	432

2.4 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.

2.5 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. ^{2.6}

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

3

Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

25 JUNE 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH HEAVY HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE EXECUTION BY HANGING OF FARÍD BIHMARDÍ ^{3.1} ON 10 JUNE 1986 IN TEHRAN. HIS FAMILY WERE UNAWARE OF HIS EXECUTION AND FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS SAD EVENT A FEW DAYS AFTER HE WAS BURIED BY THE AUTHORITIES. MR. BIHMARDÍ, AGE 46, WAS ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING BAHÁ’ÍS IN THE CRADLE OF THE FAITH. HE WAS UNDER TORTURE FOR A VERY PROLONGED PERIOD OF TIME, BUT HIS ENDURANCE WAS A SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHER BAHÁ’Í PRISONERS WHO WERE WITNESSES TO HIS SUFFERING. FIVE OTHER PRISONERS HAVE INDICATED TO THEIR VISITING RELATIVES THAT IT MAY BE THE LAST VISIT THEY WILL HAVE, WHICH IMPLIES THEIR IMMINENT EXECUTION. . . .

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

4

Visit to the World Center by Prime Minister of the Cook Islands

8 AUGUST 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

IN HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S UNABATING CONFIRMATIONS, ^{4.1} WE INFORM FRIENDS EVERYWHERE PRIVATE VISIT TO BAHÁ’Í WORLD CENTER PRIME MINISTER COOK ISLANDS SIR THOMAS DAVIS AND LADY DAVIS ³ AND ⁴ AU-

GUST. OCCASION MADE HISTORIC BY PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE IN REQUESTING CONSULTATION WITH UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE REGARDING WORLD PEACE. VISIT ALSO MARKED MOST CONCRETE RESPONSE TO DATE BY POLITICAL LEADER TO PEACE STATEMENT RELEASED TO PEOPLES WORLD LAST OCTOBER. DURING CONSULTATIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE ON FIRST DAY IN COUNCIL CHAMBER FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT SHRINE BÁB AND ON SECOND DAY AT MANSION BAHJÍ FOLLOWING HIS VISIT SHRINE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, SIR THOMAS DISCUSSED HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT WORLD PEACE AND HIS DESIRE FOR PRACTICAL ACTION CONSONANT WITH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING VAST PACIFIC AREA.

4.2 OCCASION ALSO ENABLED LADY DAVIS, LEADING MEMBER COOK ISLANDS NOBILITY AND ONE OF FIRST BAHÁ'ÍS THAT COUNTRY, TO UNDERTAKE BRIEF PILGRIMAGE THUS SPIRITUALLY ENHANCING TOTAL UNPRECEDENTED EXPERIENCE ASSOCIATED WITH VISIT TO WORLD CENTER THESE TWO DISTINGUISHED PERSONS. WHILE SIR THOMAS MET WITH US IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, LADY DAVIS WAS RECEIVED AT SEAT INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER. PUNCTUATED BY BANQUET AT SEAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, THEIR ACTIVITIES AT WORLD CENTER ENDED WITH LUNCH AT MAZRA'IH. SUBSEQUENTLY SIR THOMAS AND LADY DAVIS TRAVELED TO JERUSALEM WHERE THEY WERE ENTERTAINED BY OFFICIALS GOVERNMENT ISRAEL. THEY DEPARTED HOLY LAND ON MORNING 5 AUGUST.

4.3 ONCE AGAIN ACTION BY LEADER FROM PACIFIC OCEAN CALLS TO OUR MINDS ONE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MOST TRENCHANT ASSERTIONS CONCERNING POWER HIS CAUSE: "SHOULD THEY ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL ITS LIGHT ON THE CONTINENT," HE WROTE, "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!'"⁴⁻¹

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

4-1. GPB, p. 253.

5

Bahá'í Youth Killed in Iran

8 OCTOBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

IN VARDÁVARD, A VILLAGE IN OUTSKIRTS KARAJ, NEAR TEHRAN, SIXTEEN YEAR ^{5.1}
OLD BOY, MEMBER DEVOTED BAHÁ'Í FAMILY, BÍZHAN TÁLIBÍ, WAS KILLED A FEW
DAYS AGO. FANATICAL ELEMENTS IN VILLAGE HAD REPEATEDLY ABUSED THIS FAM-
ILY AND OTHER LOCAL FRIENDS. BODY FOUND IN GARDEN WITH EVIDENCE SE-
VERE INJURIES THROUGH BRUTAL BEATING. MURDERERS HAD THE BODY HANGED
TO SUGGEST SUICIDE. HOWEVER LOCAL GENDARMES WHO ARRIVED ON SCENE
AVERRED DEATH WAS DUE TO INJURIES. MEMBERS FAMILY COMPLAINED TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES, BUT THIS RESULTED IN HIS MOTHER, BROTHER AND COUSIN BEING
HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN TEHRAN. . . .

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

6

Apartheid

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 ^{6.1}
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 ^{6.2}
Faith, declared that mankind was entering upon a new era in its history
when accelerating processes of unification would soon compel universal rec-
ognition 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 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.

6.5 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 6.6
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 read-
ily 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 com-
munity life.

Violating as it does the very honor of humanity, the system of apartheid 6.7
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 parti-
san 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 char- 6.8
acterizes 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 in- 6.9
volvement 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 contem-
porary 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.

7

Equality of Women and Men

27 OCTOBER 1986

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

7.1 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.

7.2 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.

7.3 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.

7.4 '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:

7.4a 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)

7.4b 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, 7.4c
 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. 7.4d

(Surah 35, verse 24)

There are Prophets mentioned in the Qur’án, such as Húd and Şáliḥ, 7.5
 about whom the Bible is silent. Idrís, whom the Qur’án states was a Proph-
 et, is identified with Hermes by Bahá’u’lláh, Who states “In every tongue
 he hath a special name.”⁷⁻¹ 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 defi-
 nitely 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 can-
 not 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 7.6
 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 7.6a
 that such poor instruments accomplish the work of God. It is to dem-
 onstrate the fact that God is the power that overcomes every obstacle,
 and that Revelations are divine in origin, that leads Him to always

7-1. TB, p. 148.

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.

7.7 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.

7.8 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.⁷⁻² 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.

7.9 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

7-2. For the compilation, see CC 2:355–406 or <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/CW/>.

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.”⁷⁻³

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: 7.10

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that “soul mates” exist. 7.10a
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. 7.11

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. 7.12

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

7-3. CC 2:371.

8

New Stage in External Affairs of the Faith

29 OCTOBER 1986

To the meeting of the Senior Officers of the United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information

8.1 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 WORLD-WIDE 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 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 INTER-^{8.4} NATIONAL 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,^{8.5} 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^{8.6} 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, SHOULDERS 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.

8.7 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

9

Murder of Two Bahá'ís in Iran

31 OCTOBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

9.1 We are saddened to receive the following information from Iran. . . .

9.2 Mr. Íraj Mihdí-Nizhád, 59 years old, a prominent Bahá'í in Bandar-Abbás, was stabbed to death by a group of people. Sixteen knife wounds were observed on his body. Mr. Mihdí-Nizhád had been a civil servant and was dismissed from his job because of his faith, like thousands of other Bahá'ís. Out of necessity, he became a peddler, selling various articles in the streets in order to earn an income. Following the murder, his son-in-law and his son were detained for 48 hours by the police for questioning. However,

later on, the murderers were apprehended. They belonged to a family, one of whose members had studied the Bahá'í Faith and expressed acceptance of it. It was some of the fanatical members of that family who attacked Mr. Mihdí-Nizhád, a prominent and active Bahá'í.

The police assembled a file of evidence related to the crime and sent 9.3
it to the Attorney-General. However, the Attorney-General was apparently notified in advance by the members of the murderers' family, who may even have threatened him. As a result, before the file reached his desk he left his office, instructing his subordinate to refuse to accept the file on the pretext that the Attorney-General had gone on leave. In the meantime, the police, who had correctly carried out their duty in preparing the file, must have subsequently received instructions. As a consequence, when the file was returned to them, they indicated that no action would be taken, and even advised Mr. Mihdí-Nizhád's family to let the matter drop.

The members of the family, however, have not given up their efforts to 9.4
pursue their complaint, although it is fraught with danger and there is very little prospect of bringing the murderers to justice.

Mr. Ḥabíbu'lláh Muhtadí, 70 years of age, a retired army officer and a 9.5
graduate of law school, who had been out of the country during the Revolution, returned to Iran after the Revolution to take possession of his properties and prevent them from being confiscated. However, after he had sold one of his properties in Iran, he was immediately arrested, and the proceeds of the sale were taken from him. He was put in prison for five years, and all of his other properties were later confiscated. After his release, he was pursuing his case with the authorities to try and regain the properties which had been unjustly taken from him. On 27 August he was killed instantly by a blow to his head. Apparently, similar acts are being perpetrated by fanatical elements, emboldened by the lack of action on the part of the Government. They are sure that even if the crime is discovered, a Muslim will not be punished by law if he has committed a crime against a Bahá'í.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

10

Celebrating Christmas

6 NOVEMBER 1986

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

10.2a 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)

10.2b 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)

10.3 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.¹⁰⁻¹

10-1. TB, p. 21.

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. 10.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

11

Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God **Zikrullah Khadem**

14, 15 AND 16 NOVEMBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WITH SORROWFUL HEARTS ANNOUNCE PASSING INDEFATIGABLE FEARLESS DEFENDER FAITH DEEPLY LOVED HAND CAUSE ZIKRULLAH KHADEM. HIS STERLING SERVICES TO THE CAUSE, HIS TOTAL CONSECRATION TO TASKS ASSIGNED TO HIM BY BELOVED GUARDIAN, HIS OUTSTANDING EFFORTS AS MEMBER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY CRADLE FAITH, HIS VALUABLE SOUL-UPLIFTING STIMULATION IMPARTED BODY BELIEVERS NORTH AMERICA, PARTICULARLY UNITED STATES BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY, HIS UNTIRING ENDEAVORS THROUGH HIS TALKS AND WRITINGS IN SAFEGUARDING COVENANT AND IN INSTILLING APPRECIATION LOVE FOR SHOGHI EFFENDI SHED UNDYING LUSTER OVER PERIOD HIS ADMIRABLE STEWARDSHIP CAUSE GOD. OFFERING PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM. URGE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS NAME AT ALL HOUSES OF WORSHIP AS WELL AS IN ALL LOCAL BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES. 11.1

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

12

Infallibility of the Manifestations of God

26 NOVEMBER 1986

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

12.1 The International Teaching Center 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."

12.2 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.

12.3 . . . 's article raises fundamental issues about the station of the Manifestations and Their authority, as well as about the nature of individual interpretation.

12.4 It is clear from a study of the Text that infallibility is an essential attribute of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

12.4a . . . 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. . . .

12.4b . . . 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)

12.5 '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.¹²⁻¹ 12.5a

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: 12.6

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. 12.6a

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: 12.7

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 12.7a

12-1. SAQ, p. 173.

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)

12.8 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.

12.9 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:

12.9a 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)

12.10 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:

12.10a 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: 12.11

. . . 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. 12.11a

(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. 12.12

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. . . . 12.13

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice for the implementation of this weighty responsibility. 12.14

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

13

Conference on ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH

7 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS JOYOUS NEWS CONVOCATION HOLY LAND DURING FIRST THREE DAYS JANUARY CONFERENCE ON ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH AS FIRST MAJOR STEP 13.1

IN SIX YEAR PLAN TOWARDS FULFILLMENT GOAL EDUCATION ENTIRE COMMUNITY THIS GREAT LAW OF GOD.

13.2 TRUSTEE ҲUQÚQU'LLÁH HAND CAUSE GOD DR. 'ALÍ MUḤAMMAD VARQÁ AND FIVE HIS DEPUTIES WITH REPRESENTATIVES INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER AND WORLD CENTER FINANCE DEPARTMENT MET IN CONSULTATION WITH UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE EXAMINE ALL ASPECTS APPLICATION THIS LAW WORLD-WIDE. ACTION TAKEN DEVELOP MIGHTY INSTITUTION THROUGH APPOINTMENT BY TRUSTEE ҲUQÚQU'LLÁH THREE ADDITIONAL DEPUTIES, TWO IN AFRICA ONE IN ASIA, AND ADOPTION MEASURES LEADING ULTIMATE ESTABLISHMENT CENTRAL OFFICE ҲUQÚQU'LLÁH HOLY LAND AT HEART ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER FAITH.

13.3 DECISIONS TAKEN PREPARE CODIFICATION FOR DISTRIBUTION ALL COMMUNITIES TOGETHER WITH OTHER MATERIALS FACILITATE STUDY FRIENDS THIS LAW OBEDIENCE TO WHICH CHARACTERIZED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AS "A BOUNTY WHICH SHALL REMAIN WITH EVERY SOUL IN EVERY WORLD OF THE WORLDS OF GOD."

13.4 DELIGHTED ACTIONS TAKEN BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES DISSEMINATION TEXTS ISSUED 4TH JULY 1985.¹³⁻¹ CONFERENCE STIRRED BY REPORTS WESTERN BELIEVERS ALREADY SPONTANEOUSLY OFFERING ҲUQÚQU'LLÁH ON READING COMPILATION, SWELLING RANKS THOSE WHO HAVE LONG CHERISHED PRIVILEGE OBSERVE THIS LAW. URGE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES WHO HAVE NOT YET PUBLISHED COMPILATION TO EXPEDITE TRANSLATION PUBLICATION. CONDENSED COMPILATION NOW IN COURSE PREPARATION EASE TASK THOSE NATIONAL COMMUNITIES WHICH HAVE LIMITED FACILITIES TRANSLATION.

13.5 IT IS OUR ARDENT PRAYER SACRED THRESHOLD THAT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH WILL ABUNDANTLY BLESS PROCESSES NOW SET IN MOTION.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

14

Release of a Compilation on Trustworthiness

18 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

14.1 The Universal House of Justice felt that a compilation on trustworthiness, a cardinal Bahá'í virtue, would be useful to the friends everywhere, as

13-1. A reference to the compilation on Ҳuqúqu'llah; see CC 1:489–527.

they are endeavoring in their personal lives to mirror forth the eternal moral precepts inculcated in the teachings. The House of Justice has instructed the Research Department to prepare a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on this subject.

A copy of this compilation is attached.¹⁴⁻¹ The Universal House of Justice 14.2 leaves it to your discretion to determine how the friends under your jurisdiction can best be informed of its contents and encouraged to study them carefully.

It is of vital importance that the Bahá'í standard of trustworthiness be 14.3 upheld at this time when the House of Justice has offered the Bahá'í experience to the world as a model for study in its search for peace. Furthermore, the central theme which the compilation helps to stress is a vital element which will contribute to the success of the rapidly increasing number of social and economic development projects undertaken by Bahá'í communities throughout the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

15

Passing of Charles Wolcott, Member of the Universal House of Justice

27 AND 28 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

DEEPLY GRIEVED PASSING DISTINGUISHED SERVANT CAUSE GOD, DEDICATED 15.1
WORKER HIS VINEYARD CHARLES WOLCOTT. SELFLESSNESS, HUMILITY, COURAGE,
NOBILITY, FAIR-MINDEDNESS, PERSEVERANCE CHARACTERIZED HIS UNINTER-
RUPTED SERVICES COURSE HALF A CENTURY, IN HIS CAPACITY AS MEMBER AND
LATER SECRETARY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY CRADLE ADMINISTRATIVE OR-
DER, AS SECRETARY-GENERAL INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL FOLLOWED BY
HIS OUTSTANDING LABORS AS MEMBER UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE SINCE ITS
INCEPTION. PRAYING SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL, CONFIDENT RICH

14-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 2:327–53.

WELL-DESERVED REWARD ABHÁ KINGDOM HIS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION PROGRESS CONSOLIDATION FAITH NORTH AMERICA AND AT WORLD CENTER. EXTEND LOVING SYMPATHY HIS BELOVED WIDOW WHO SHARED SUPPORTED HIS SERVICES THROUGHOUT PERIOD HIS DISTINGUISHED PROFESSIONAL CAREER, HIS BRILLIANT LABORS CAUSE GOD AND TO HIS BEREAVED DAUGHTERS AND FAMILY. ADVISE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS, INCLUDING COMMEMORATIVE SERVICES IN HIS HONOR ALL MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁRS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

16

Execution of a Bahá'í in Iran

29 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

16.1 WITH HEAVY HEARTS ANNOUNCE ANOTHER EXECUTION IN IRAN. AFTER TWO YEARS' IMPRISONMENT, MOSTLY IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, AND HAVING BEEN SUBJECTED TO MUCH TORTURE, AIMED AT HIS RECENT FAITH, MR. AHMAD KÁVIH WAS EXECUTED ON 26 JANUARY IN ISFAHAN BY FIRING SQUAD. HE WAS IN HIS MID FIFTIES AND A MERCHANT. NO INFORMATION RECEIVED AS TO ANY TRIAL PRIOR HIS EXECUTION. . . .

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

17

Interpretations of Sacred Writings

9 MARCH 1987

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

17.1 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 17.2 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.”¹⁷⁻¹

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.”¹⁷⁻² 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: 17.3

. . . 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. 17.3a

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. 17.4

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

17-1. KA, ¶182.

17-2. KI, ¶283; GWB, no. 89.1.

18

Avoiding Partisan Politics and Promoting the Lesser Peace

10 MARCH 1987

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

18.1 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.

18.2 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.

18.3 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.

18.4 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, 18.5 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, 18.6 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 18.7 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 18.8 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 differ- 18.8a ently 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)

- 18.9 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.
- 18.10 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”¹⁸⁻¹ 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.”
- 18.11 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.
- 18.11a 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.”¹⁸⁻²
- 18.12 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

18-1. MBW, p. 74

18-2. See WOB, pp. 161–206.

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

19

Execution of Two Bahá'ís in Iran

13 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

CONVEY SAD NEWS PAST FEW DAYS MR. SURÚSH JABBÁRÍ AND MR. ABU'L-QÁSIM 19.1
SHÁYIQ WERE EXECUTED IN TEHRAN. EXACT DATE AND MANNER OF THEIR EXECU-
TION ARE NOT KNOWN AS NO ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE, AND THERE IS NO
INDICATION WHETHER OR NOT TRIALS WERE HELD. THEIR BODIES WERE BURIED
WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE THEIR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

MR. JABBÁRÍ WAS 42 YEARS OLD AND HAD BEEN IN PRISON SINCE 15 SEPTEMBER 19.2
1984. HE WAS AN ENGINEER. MR. SHÁYIQ WAS 47 YEARS OF AGE AND HAD BEEN IN
PRISON SINCE 13 FEBRUARY 1984. HE WAS A GRADUATE IN HISTORY AND WORKED
FOR THE GOVERNMENT BEFORE HIS DISMISSAL AS A BAHÁ'Í.

NO OTHER DETAILS ARE AVAILABLE. 19.3

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

20

Election of New Member of Universal House of Justice

20 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

WARMLY WELCOME NEWLY ELECTED MEMBER HOUSE JUSTICE PETER KHAN. 20.1

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

21

Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

25 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

21.1 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.²¹⁻¹

21.2 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.

21.3 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

21-1. See CC 1:489–527.

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)²¹⁻² and a sacred institution ^{21.4} (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 reem- ^{21.5}phasized 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

21-2. The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh issued by the House of Justice.

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.

21.6 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.

21.7 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

21.8 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, 21.9 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 21.10 items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

- A. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh are:
 1. The residence and its needful²¹⁻³ furnishings (11).
 2. The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce income for one's subsistence (12, 67, 68).
- B. Payment falls due:
 1. 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.]
 - a. The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the assessable property (10, 14).
 - b. The payment is due on whole units of 19 mithqáls of gold (15).
 2. 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:
 - a. The general expenses of living (65, 66, 69, 78).
 - b. Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions (103).
 - c. Sums which are paid to the State, such as taxes and duties (78).

21-3. See III.C.1.

3. 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).
 4. 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.
 5. 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).
 6. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (22).
 7. The payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is dependent on the person's financial ability to meet his obligations (24).
 8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is accomplished in the following manner:
 - a. The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial (22).
 - b. Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (13).
 - c. 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).
- C. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu'lláh:
1. It is left to the discretion of the individual believer to decide what is “needful” for himself and his family (104–6, 112).
 2. 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).

3. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honor their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).
4. 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.
5. 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). 21.11

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). 21.12

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). 21.13

The Development of the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

March 1987

Prepared by the Research Department
at the request of the Universal House of Justice

21.14 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.

21.15 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.

21.16 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.

21.17 To receive the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh brought into being one of the great Institutions of the Faith, the Trusteeship of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

21.18 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 21.19
Iran to receive the Remains of the Báb from their custodian, the devoted and valiant Hand of the Cause of God Jináb-i-Ḥájí 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 21.20
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- 21.21
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 Násiri'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.

21.22 Among the countless journeys that Hájí 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, Hájí Ghulám Riḍá, who, at the express desire of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had been appointed his successor as Trustee of Ḥuququ'lláh. Upon his passing in 1928, Hájí Amín was named by the beloved Guardian a Hand of the Cause of God.

21.23 The third Trustee of Ḥuququ'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 Ḥuququ'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. 21.24

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. 21.25

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. 21.26

- 21.27 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 Riḍván 1953. These memorable services culminated in the fulfillment of his long-cherished desire to visit the beloved Guardian.
- 21.28 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.
- 21.29 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."
- 21.30 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 Riḍván 1963, the Universal House of Justice.
- 21.31 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.
- 21.32 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.
- 21.33 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.

22

Riḍván Message 1987

RiḌVÁN 1987

Dearly loved Friends,

The launching of the Six Year Plan at Riḍván 1986 coincided with the opening of a new epoch—the fourth—in the organic unfoldment of the Formative Age of our Faith. The Administrative institutions of this growing Cause of God had already begun to show signs of an increasing maturity, while at the same time emerging from the protective obscurity of their early days into the larger arena of public notice. These twin processes were signalized by a development of far-reaching consequence to the internal life of the Bahá'í community and by an outward activity of a magnitude unprecedented in its entire history. 22.1

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. 22.2

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. 22.3

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. 22.4

- 22.5 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.
- 22.6 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.
- 22.7 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”²²⁻¹ 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.
- 22.8 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.

22-1. ADJ, p. 16.

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. ^{22.9}

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. . . ." ²²⁻² The questions that such concentrated study should answer will un- ^{22.10}

22-2. GPB, p. 100.

doubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, its origin and what should be our attitude towards it.

22.11 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.

22.12 Great and wonderful tasks challenge us as never before. They demand equally great and wonderful sacrifice, dedication and single-minded devotion from every one of us. At present, the Bahá'í International Fund is utterly inadequate to support the tremendous expansion now required in all the multitudinous activities of the Bahá'í world community. The record of the Seven Year Plan, just completed, stands witness to our ability to meet the growing demands of the Cause. The heroism of the beloved friends in Iran, the eager response of 3,694 dedicated pioneers to the call raised for this essential service, the unceasing activity of teachers, administrators, local communities and individual believers throughout the entire organism of the embryonic world order, have endowed this growing Army of Life with new strengths and capacities. As we stride forward into the future we may be fully assured of His ever present bounty and the final victory of our efforts to establish His Kingdom in this troubled world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

23

Negotiations with the Government of Israel for Development of the Bahá'í World Center

30 APRIL 1987

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

This Ridván, after decades of unabated effort involving prolonged, delicate negotiations, the Government of the State of Israel and the Bahá'í World Center signed an international agreement whose implications—spiritual, historical, and practical—are inestimable for the rapidly evolving World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. ^{23.1}

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 Center.” 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. ^{23.2}

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 ^{23.3}

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 Center with the Government of this country.

23.4 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 Center, 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:

23.4a 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 Center 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.

23.4b 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 ^{23.5} 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 Center 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 ^{23.6} 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 ^{23.7} 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 ^{23.8} 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 ^{23.8a} the close of which on 2 January 1986 was announced the opening of the fourth epoch.

- 23.8b – 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.
 - 23.8c – 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.
 - 23.8d – 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.
 - 23.8e – 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.
 - 23.8f – 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.
 - 23.8g – The participation of Bahá'í publishers in an International Book Fair in the capital of the People's Republic of China.
 - 23.8h – 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.
 - 23.8i – The establishment in Liberia of the first Bahá'í radio station on the continent of Africa.
 - 23.8j – 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.
- 23.9 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 ^{23.10} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

24

Pioneer Goals for Remainder of Six Year Plan

14 MAY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to send this list ^{24.1} of pioneer goals, which represents the minimum need for pioneers to settle within the next two years of the Six Year Plan. The goals for the Eastern European countries and the USSR are envisioned to cover the entire period of the Plan.

Formulated in consultation with the International Teaching Center, this ^{24.2} first pioneer call has taken into consideration the requests for pioneers set forth by National Spiritual Assemblies. As the Bahá'í community grows and matures, its needs become more specialized and this call reflects the degree to which pioneers are needed for specific regions and to perform specific functions once they arrive at their posts.

While the settling of international pioneers is imperative, the House of ^{24.3} Justice also wishes to emphasize the importance of homefront pioneering, which, in the majority of countries, is one of the most effective means of promoting and consolidating the Cause. You should feel free to seek assis-

tance from the Continental Boards of Counselors, other National Spiritual Assemblies, and the Continental Pioneer Committees towards the realization of your pioneer goals.

24.4 The Universal House of Justice wishes to express its appreciation of the sacrificial services rendered by both international and homefront pioneers throughout the world. It looks forward to seeing the results of further achievements in the pioneering field and will offer prayers in the Holy Shrines for the successful fulfillment of these sacred responsibilities.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

25

Authority of Local Spiritual Assemblies

14 MAY 1987

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

25.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 9 April 1987 and has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

25.2 You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on behalf of the Native American Indian Bahá'í Institute at Burnt Water for the success of its efforts in raising the number of Navajo Indian believers who are well deepened in the Faith.

25.3 With regard to the two quotations you have cited about the authority of the Local Spiritual Assembly, and your question about what you consider to be contradictory, the two self-explanatory extracts are indeed complementary. In both extracts individual believers and communities are required to uphold the authority of the Local Assembly and obey its decisions. The prerogative of the believer to offer at the Nineteen Day Feast "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"²⁵⁻¹ does not give him or the community the right to disobey a decision of the Assembly or to act in such a way as to undermine its authority. The point to bear in mind is also included in the first extract from Shoghi

25-1. LG, no. 288.

Effendi's writings quoted in your letter: "But again it should be stressed 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."²⁵⁻²

A careful study of the principles of Bahá'í Administration and procedures which confirm the authority of the Assembly and, at the same time, guarantee the individual's right to freedom of expression and provide him with the right of appeal, will clarify the questions you have in this regard. ^{25.4}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26

Recitation of the Prayer for the Dead

22 MAY 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In response to your letter of 15 April 1987 enclosing a letter from Miss ^{26.1}
. . . concerning the Prayer for the Dead, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to reply as follows.

The Prayer for the Dead should be read in its entirety by one person, ^{26.2}
while all others stand in silence. It is not the practice for those present to repeat any part of the prayer in unison.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

25-2. LG, no. 288.

27

International Collaboration Goals

5 JUNE 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 27.1 On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, we send herewith the international collaboration goals for the Six Year Plan, based on your own considerations and on consultations with the International Teaching Center.
- 27.2 The goals are devised not only to achieve objectives, but to encourage mutual cooperation and sharing of ideas between National Spiritual Assemblies, processes which will strengthen the unity of the Bahá'í world community and enable it to present to mankind the pattern of a truly organic, universal, diversified but united society.
- 27.3 The House of Justice will offer its fervent prayers at the Holy Shrines that God may guide you in your devoted labors and enable you to carry out the tasks at hand with steadfastness and perseverance to achieve ultimate victory.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

28

Bahá'í Education of Children

6 JUNE 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 28.1 Among the Six Year Plan goals for collaboration between national communities, are those concerned with the Bahá'í education of our children. The goals set out in the attached statement are of three kinds: goals for systematic teacher training, for the preparation of lesson plans for all age groups, and for the creation of teaching materials to support the educational process.
- 28.2 The group of national communities summoned to this vital and long overdue program of collaboration are those who are already known to be advanced in providing systematic child education, but also include some few now asked to make a positive contribution to this cooperative venture.

The Universal House of Justice will offer fervent prayers for the success of your labors in carrying out this collaborative project of utmost importance. ^{28.3}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

29

Plight of the Indigenous and Aboriginal Peoples

15 JUNE 1987

To two individual Bahá'ís
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. ^{29.1}

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. ^{29.2}

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. ^{29.3}

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: ^{29.4}

29.4a 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:

29.4b 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. . . .

29.5 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:

29.5a . . . 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.

29.5b 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.²⁹⁻¹

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. ^{29.6}

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. ^{29.7}

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. ^{29.8}

29-1. MUHJ, no. 151.6–7.

29.9 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

30 Conduct of a National Convention

19 JUNE 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

30.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 10 June 1987 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

30.2 The House of Justice was very pleased to know how fruitful you have found the consultation at your recent National Conventions to have been.

30.3 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.

30.4 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

31

The Bahá'í Role in Promoting World Peace

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. ^{31.1}

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. ^{31.2}

The following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer: ^{31.3}

- 31.3a 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.”³¹⁻¹
- 31.4 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.
- 31.5 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

31-1. See WOB, pp. 161–206.

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

32

Requirements for Membership in the Bahá'í Community

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 32.1
Universal House of Justice, which has directed us to reply as follows.

In considering the status of believers such as Mr. . . . , it is necessary 32.2
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 32.2a
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 submis-
sion to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast
adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close as-
sociation with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í
administration throughout the world—these I conceive to be the fun-
damental 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:

32.2b 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)³²⁻¹

32.3 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:

32.3a . . . 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)

32.4 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.

32.5 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.

32-1. See MUHJ, no. 18.

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. 32.6

The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Sacred Threshold for your guidance in resolving this matter. 32.7

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

33

Functioning of an Executive Committee of a National Spiritual Assembly

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. 33.1

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. 33.2

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. 33.3

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 mem- 33.4

bers 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.

33.5 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.

33.6 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.

33.7 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 ^{33.8} 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

34

Passing of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh 'Azíz Navídí

6 AUGUST 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa

GRIEVED PASSING DEVOTED DEDICATED SERVANT CAUSE KNIGHT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ^{34.1} 'AZÍZ NAVÍDÍ. HIS FEARLESS DEFENSE OPPRESSED BAHÁ'ÍS CRADLE FAITH HIGHLY PRAISED BY BELOVED GUARDIAN. HIS CONTINUOUS SERVICES PIONEERING FIELD CROWNED BY OUTSTANDING SUCCESSES GAIN RECOGNITION FAITH BY MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES OBTAINED THROUGH HIS UTTER RELIANCE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND HIS INDEFATIGABLE RESOURCEFULNESS SACRIFICIAL EFFORTS, ALL SHED LUSTER UPON HIS LOVING MEMORY. REQUESTING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA HOLD MEMORIAL SERVICE MOTHER TEMPLE AFRICA RECOGNITION UNIQUE SERVICES THAT CONTINENT. ASSURE ARDENT PRAYERS PROGRESS SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERING LONDON.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

35

Support of Bahá'í Funds Exclusively by Believers

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 ^{35.1} Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows.

35.2 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.

35.3 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"³⁵⁻¹ clearly indicates what the attitude of the Bahá'ís should be.

35.4 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.

35.5 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,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

35-1. GWB, no. 100.2.

36

Plans for Development of the Buildings on the Arc and Terraces

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 ^{36.1} 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 ^{36.2} 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 ^{36.3} 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 ^{36.4} 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.

- 36.4a – **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.
- 36.4b – **The International Teaching Center** 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.
- 36.4c – **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.
- 36.4d – **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.
- 36.4e – **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. ^{36.5}

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.”³⁶⁻¹ 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 ^{36.6}

36-1. CF, p. 117.

material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.”³⁶⁻²
This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour
whose coming it is our task to hasten.

36.7 At this climacteric of human history, we are called upon to rise up in sac-
rificial 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

37

Execution of Two Bahá'ís in Iran

1 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

37.1 WITH PROFOUND SORROW AND DEEP SENSE OUTRAGE WE CONVEY REPORT
JUST RECEIVED AT WORLD CENTER THAT ON 28 SEPTEMBER TWO BAHÁ'ÍS WERE
EXECUTED IN TEHRAN. MR. ARDISHÍR AKHTÁRÍ AND MR. AMÍR-ḤUSAYN NÁDIRÍ
WERE FORMER MEMBERS OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF IRAN. BOTH HAD
BEEN IN PRISON SINCE 12 SEPTEMBER 1984. DEATH SENTENCES WERE PASSED WHILE
SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNITED NATIONS WAS VISITING IRAN.

37.2 MESSRS. AKHTÁRÍ AND NÁDIRÍ, AS WELL AS MR. SURÚSH JABBÁRÍ AND MR. ABU'L-
QÁSIM SHÁYIQ WHO WERE EXECUTED ON 3 MARCH 1987, WERE AMONG GROUP OF
14 BAHÁ'Í PRISONERS WHOSE FATE HAS BEEN SOURCE ACUTE CONCERN TO BAHÁ'ÍS
IRAN SINCE BEGINNING THIS YEAR. . . .

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

36-2. CF, p. 115.

38

Release of a Compilation on Crisis and Victory

11 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *Crisis and Victory*, which ^{38.1} was prepared by the Research Department at our instruction.³⁸⁻¹ The purpose of this compilation is to orient the believers to the processes, within and without the Faith, that will accompany its progressive emergence on the world stage.

Tribulations attend and fuel the unfoldment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. ^{38.2} In describing the sweep of Bahá'í history, the beloved Guardian identified a pattern of growth which is characterized by “a series of pulsations, of alternating crises and triumphs, leading it [the Faith] ever nearer to its divinely appointed destiny.”³⁸⁻²

As the stature of the Cause of God increases in the eyes of the world, the ^{38.3} process of its emergence into the limelight of public attention, resulting, in large part, from the indescribable sacrifices of the beloved friends in Iran, is accelerated, and the Faith, gradually and inevitably, is projected into the next stage of its divinely propelled development.

The shelter of its relatively imperceptible expansion enabled the founda- ^{38.4} tions of the Faith to be established and consolidated, and the community to attain a level of stability. Now, with the entrance of the Faith on the world scene, we call upon the believers everywhere not to allow themselves, even for one moment, to be perturbed by any increase in opposition to the Cause. Rather let them deepen their understanding of the creative interaction between crisis and victory in the evolution of the Faith, and increase their awareness of the power inherent in the Cause to surmount all obstacles that threaten its progress. Armed with this knowledge, let them seize the opportunities that arise and embrace the God-given challenges, confident in the invincibility of the Faith and the steady onward march of its Institutions.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

38-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1:131–85.

38-2. GPB, p. 409.

39

Arrest of Six Bahá'ís in Iran

22 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

39.1 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.

39.2 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

40

Message to the Bahá'í Publishers' Conference, London

26 OCTOBER 1987

To Bahá'í Publishers' Conference (London)

40.1 WE EXTEND A WARM WELCOME TO ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THIS TIMELY CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING, THE FIRST OF THIS NATURE SINCE THAT HELD IN MONTREAL FOLLOWING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SEPTEMBER 1982. WE COMMEND BOTH THE INITIATIVE TAKEN BY THE UNITED KINGDOM PUBLISHING TRUST IN INAUGURATING THE PRESENT HISTORIC GATHERING AND THE ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE IT GENERATED AMONG NATIONAL COMMUNITIES EUROPE AND BEYOND WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH THE VITAL QUESTIONS IT WILL CONSIDER. THIS DEGREE OF RESPONSE BETOKENS RECOGNITION ON PART OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE SIX YEAR PLAN SET OUT IN OUR LETTER OF 25 FEBRUARY 1986 CALLING FOR A WORLDWIDE INCREASE IN THE TRANSLATION, PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE. AS YOU BEGIN YOUR DELIBERATIONS WE HASTEN TO

ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROLE BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING AGENCIES PLAY IN FULFILLING THIS GOAL AS WELL AS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENTS IN THE DISTRIBUTION AND THE INCREASED PRODUCTION OF LITERATURE. WE LOOK FORWARD EAGERLY TO THE REPORT OF YOUR GATHERING AND PARTICULARLY YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED INCREASE IN THE AVAILABILITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS WHOSE CAPACITY TO UPLIFT, HEAL, INSPIRE AND DIRECT IS THE VERY BEDROCK OF ALL OUR TEACHING EFFORTS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

41

Further Information on Bahá'ís Arrested in Iran

30 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

RE OUR MESSAGE OF 21 OCTOBER ANNOUNCING ARREST OF SIX BAHÁ'ÍS IRAN, 41.1
WE NOW HAVE FOLLOWING INFORMATION.

FIVE OF THE SIX HAVE BEEN FOUND EVIN PRISON. THEY HAVE BEEN VISITED BY 41.2
FRIENDS AND APPEAR TO BE WELL.

WE HAVE LEARNED THAT MRS. RUZÍTÁ SAMANDARÍ HAD NOT ACTUALLY BEEN 41.3
ARRESTED. ANOTHER BAHÁ'Í WOMAN, A RELATIVE OF ONE PRISONER, WAS ARRESTED
SHORTLY AFTER ARREST FIVE MEN AND SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED.

FATE FORMER MEMBERS NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY GREATLY FEARED AS 41.4
INDICATED OUR PREVIOUS MESSAGE.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

42

Joining the Network on Conservation and Religion

3 NOVEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE THAT DURING OCTOBER BAHÁ'Í FAITH BECAME SIXTH WORLD 42.1
RELIGION TO JOIN THE NETWORK ON CONSERVATION AND RELIGION WHICH WAS
FORMED SEPTEMBER 1986 AT EVENT IN ASSISI, ITALY, TO MARK 25TH ANNIVERSARY

FOUNDING WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) WHICH IS WORLD'S LARGEST PRIVATE NATURE CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION. BAHÁ'ÍS WERE INVOLVED IN SERIES OF RELATED EVENTS BETWEEN 3-5 OCTOBER 1987. AMONG THESE WAS CEREMONY IN WINCHESTER, ENGLAND, IN WHICH BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ISSUED OFFICIAL BAHÁ'Í STATEMENT ON NATURE AND FORMALLY ENTERED NETWORK, SIGNALING NEW LEVEL COLLABORATION BETWEEN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTEREST GROUPS. BBC WORLD SERVICE BROADCAST NEWS THIS DEVELOPMENT SEVERAL TIMES. HIGHLIGHT THESE EVENTS WAS SPECIAL MEETING 5 OCTOBER IN GLAND, SWITZERLAND, WORLD HEADQUARTERS WFE, WHEN HRH THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH, PRESIDENT OF WWF, RECEIVED COPY BAHÁ'Í STATEMENT ON NATURE FROM AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚĤÍYYIH KHÁNUM WHO HEADED BAHÁ'Í DELEGATION TO MEETING. PRINCE PHILIP RESPONDED WITH PARTICULAR INTEREST TO COMMENTS BY AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚĤÍYYIH KHÁNUM ON IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CONSERVATION AT VILLAGE LEVEL.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

43

Resignation of Two Members of the Universal House of Justice

17 NOVEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Beloved Friends,

43.1 In view of the steadily increasing burden of work resting upon the members of the Universal House of Justice, which will undoubtedly grow still heavier during the years immediately ahead, Mr. David Hoffman and Mr. Borrah Kavelin, after prayerful consideration as to the best interests of the Cause of God, have, in light of their advanced ages, requested permission to relinquish their membership on this body in accordance with Article V.2.(c) of the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.

43.2 The House of Justice has regretfully accepted the resignation of these beloved members, who have rendered a quarter of a century of continuous and highly valued service in the Holy Land. They will thus be able to continue their services to the Cause of God free from the inexorable pressure of work at the World Center. Since, however, the next international election is

so near, we have requested them to remain in office until that time, and this they have readily agreed to.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

44

Activities of Bahá'ís in Relation to Governments

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. 44.1

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 . . . inquiring about permissible activities of the Bahá'ís in relation to governments. . . . We have been asked to convey the following. 44.2

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: 44.3

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed 44.3a

ted 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:

44.3b 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:

44.3c 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:

44.3d 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)

44.4 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.

44.5 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 govern- ^{44.6}ments, 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 ^{44.7}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 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 involv-

ing or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in the incontrovertible promise of Bahá'u'lláh to protect His community.

44.8 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

45

Release of a Compilation on the Covenant

25 DECEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

45.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *The Covenant*, which was prepared by the Research Department at our instruction.⁴⁵⁻¹

45.2 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, the 100th anniversary of the inception of which will be commemorated in 1992, must be the subject of sustained and concentrated study. Instituted by the Revealer of God's Word in this Day to direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation, the Covenant in essence guarantees the continuation of divine guidance after the ascension of the Manifestation through the presence in the world of an institution to which all the friends must turn.

45.3 So important for the development of the Faith at this time is the understanding of the Covenant in all its aspects that it has been designated as a major theme of the Six Year Plan. It is our earnest hope that the new compilation, consisting of extracts which convey essential elements of the Covenant, will serve not only to deepen the understanding and love of the believers for the Covenant, but also to increase their level of conviction, and their loyalty to the Cause and its Institutions. To this end you will undoubtedly wish to arrange for the compilation to be made available to the friends

45-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1:111-29.

and, if translation is required, to have it translated in full into the main language or languages used in the areas under your jurisdiction. Should it be necessary to translate the text into vernacular languages of limited usage, you are free of course to prepare an abridged form by selecting extracts from the compilation.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

46 Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination

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. 46.1

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. 46.2

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 46.3

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.

46.4 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 indigenoussness, 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."⁴⁶⁻¹ 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.

46.5 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

46-1. GWB, no. 117.

47

Request Special Prayers for Bahá'ís in Iran

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. ^{47.1}

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.”⁴⁷⁻¹ 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. ^{47.2}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

48

Riḍván Message 1988

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. ^{48.1}

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 evi- ^{48.2}

47-1. PM, no. 85.

dences 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.

48.3 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.

48.4 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.

48.5 This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of national Bahá'í external affairs representatives from Europe and North Amer-

ica, 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 ^{48.6} 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. ^{48.7} 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 ^{48.8} 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.⁴⁸⁻¹ 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.”⁴⁸⁻² 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.

^{48.9} 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.

^{48.10} Every individual believer—man, woman, youth and child—is summoned to this field of action; for it is on the initiative, the resolute will of the individual to teach and to serve, that the success of the entire community depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, sustained by daily prayer and reading of the Holy Word, strengthened by a continual striving to obtain a deeper understanding of the divine Teachings, illumined by a constant 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.”⁴⁸⁻³

48-1. WT, p. 10.

48-2. BP, p. 310.

48-3. BA, p. 66.

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”⁴⁸⁻⁴—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.”⁴⁸⁻⁵ 48.11

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.”⁴⁸⁻⁶ 48.12

You have our abiding assurance of ardent and constant prayers for you all. 48.13

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

49

Election of the Universal House of Justice— Riḍván 1988

1 MAY 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ‘ALÍ NAKHJAVÁNÍ, GLENFORD MITCHELL, HUSHMAND FATHEAZAM, IAN SEMPLE, PETER KHAN, DAVID RUHE, HUGH CHANCE, HOOPER DUNBAR, ADIB TAHERZADEH. 49.1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

48-4. ADJ, ¶107; GWB, no. 96.3.

48-5. ADJ, ¶68.

48-6. ADJ, ¶107.

50

Purchase of Area Near the Grave of the Guardian

10 MAY 1988

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

- 50.1 HIGHLY PLEASED ANNOUNCE COMPLETION AGREEMENT WITH OWNERS NEW SOUTHGATE CEMETERY PURCHASE LARGE AREA ADJACENT RESTING PLACE BELOVED GUARDIAN. OFFERING PRAYERS GRATITUDE SACRED THRESHOLD OPPORTUNITY ENSURE PROTECTION PRECINCTS HALLOWED SPOT.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

51

Appointment of International Teaching Center Members

19 MAY 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

- 51.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUNSELOR MEMBERS INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1988: DR. FARZAM ARBAB, DR. MAGDALENE CARNEY, MR. HARTMUT GROSSMANN, MR. MAS'ÚD KHAMSÍ, MRS. LAURETTA KING, MR. DONALD ROGERS, MRS. ISOBEL SABRI, MRS. JOY STEVENSON, MR. PETER VUYIYA. VIEW SUPREME IMPORTANCE ACCELERATION TEACHING WORK THIS STAGE FORMATIVE AGE, NUMBER COUNSELOR MEMBERS NOW RAISED TO NINE. EXPRESS PROFOUND GRATITUDE MR. 'AZÍZ YAZDÍ AND MISS ANNELIESE BOPP FOR THEIR ASSIDUOUS DEVOTED SELF-SACRIFICING SERVICES TEACHING CENTER OVER SO MANY YEARS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

52

Membership on 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. ^{52.1}

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.”⁵²⁻¹ The significance of this important provision is that the religion of God is safeguarded and protected against schism and its essential unity is preserved. ^{52.2}

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 ^{52.3}

52-1. WOB, p. 151.

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:

52.3a 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. . . .
(p. 14)

And in one of His Tablets He had already written:

52.3b 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.⁵²⁻²

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:

52.3c 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. 80⁵²⁻³)

52-2. CC 1:322.
52-3. SWAB, no. 38.4.

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. 52.3d

(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: 52.4

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. 52.4a

...

(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. 52.5

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: 52.6

52.6a 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.

52.7 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.”⁵²⁻⁴ 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:

52-4. MBW, p. 65.

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.⁵²⁻⁵ 52.7a

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 Center 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. 52.8

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. 52.9

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

52-5. KA, p. 6.

53

First Meeting of New International Teaching Center

16 JUNE 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

53.1 WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS CONVEY TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH THROUGHOUT WORLD JOYFUL NEWS FIRST MEETING NEWLY APPOINTED INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER.

53.2 ON MORNING OF FRIDAY THIRD JUNE THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚĤÍYYIH 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.

53.3 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.

53.4 REJOICE NEW VISTAS OPENING FOR VICTORIOUS PROMOTION CAUSE GOD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

54

New Members of Universal House of Justice, International Teaching Center, and Continental Boards of Counselors

16 JUNE 1988

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

54.1 Recent events have given rise to eleven vacancies in the membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors. Mr. Adib Taherzadeh has been elected to the Universal House of Justice; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Mrs. Lauretta King, Mr. Donald Rogers, Mrs. Joy Stevenson

and Mr. Peter Vuyiya have been appointed as Counselor members of the International Teaching Center.

In addition, ill health has sadly made it impossible for Dr. Chellie Sundram to continue his services as a Counselor for Asia, Dr. Iraj Ayman and Mrs. Thelma Khelghati have been compelled by circumstances beyond their control to leave, respectively, the continents of Asia and Africa in which they were serving, and Mr. Adam Thorne has had to resign, for personal reasons, from the Continental Board of Counselors for Europe. We wish first to express our profound appreciation of the contributions these dear friends have made to the advancement of the Cause of God during their years of service as Counselors, and we pray that the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh will surround them in all they undertake in the future. ^{54.2}

We now have great happiness in announcing the appointment of the following believers as Continental Counselors: ^{54.3}

Africa: Mr. George Allen and Mr. Hizzaya Hissani

The Americas: Mr. Gustavo Correa, Mrs. Jacqueline Delahunt and Dr. William Roberts

Asia: Dr. Kim Myung-Jung and Mrs. Shantha Sundram

Australasia: Mrs. Violette Haake

Europe: Mr. Patrick O'Mara, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlischlegel and Dr. Shapoor Rassekh.

Furthermore, as two of the Counselors now appointed to the International Teaching Center had been Trustees of their respective Continental Funds, we now appoint Counselor Peter McLaren to be Trustee of the Continental Fund in the Americas, and Counselor Ben Ayala to be Trustee in Australasia. ^{54.4}

As was abundantly apparent at the time of the Sixth International Bahá'í Convention and in the meetings of the Counselors which followed, the Bahá'í world has entered on a stage of the greatest importance in its development, when the teaching work throughout the world must be in the forefront of the thoughts of every ardent follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The challenges and opportunities are great, and are increasing in number with each passing day. We supplicate the Almighty to grant an unprecedented measure of divine confirmation to the institutions of His embryonic World Order and to His faithful believers who are laboring for the diffusion of His Message in every region of the globe. ^{54.5}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

55

The Importance of Reaching Out to Native Communities

25 JULY 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

55.1 Your letter of 30 March 1988 has been received by the Universal House of Justice and we have been asked to respond as follows.

55.2 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."⁵⁵⁻¹ 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."⁵⁵⁻² 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."⁵⁵⁻³ 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.

55.3 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

55-1. GWB, no. 63.8.

55-2. GWB, no. 45.

55-3. GWB, no. 129.2.

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 world-wide 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.

^{55.7} 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."⁵⁵⁻⁴

^{55.8} 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.⁵⁵⁻⁵ Your attention is directed to the emphasis

55-4. GWB, no. 117.

55-5. See no. 30, pp. 58–59.

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,⁵⁵⁻⁶ 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. 55.9

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. 55.10

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 edu- 55.11

55-6. See no. 47, p. 81.

cation, 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.

55.12 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

56

Release of a Compilation on Living a Chaste and Holy Life

30 SEPTEMBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

56.1 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.⁵⁶⁻¹

56.2 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

56-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1:45–64.

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 56.3 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 56.4 the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be overemphasized.

In the current climate of social and moral decline, at a time when, in 56.5 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,”⁵⁶⁻² 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, 56.5a 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.⁵⁶⁻³

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

56-2. CC 2:13.

56-3. CC 1:382.

57

Remarkable Numbers of New Enrollments

13 OCTOBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

57.1 REJOICE EVE WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS ANNIVERSARY BIRTH BLESSED BÁB EVIDENCES GROWING NUMBER NATIONAL COMMUNITIES ENGAGED TEACHING INITIATIVES LEADING TO ENTRY BY TROOPS. THIRTY-FIVE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES HAVE SPONTANEOUSLY REPORTED ENROLLMENTS TOTALING QUARTER MILLION NEW BELIEVERS SINCE RIḌVÁN. GRATIFIED NOTEWORTHY CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITIES ESSENTIAL SAFEGUARD HARD-WON VICTORIES. HOUR PROPITIOUS FRIENDS ASSEMBLIES EVERYWHERE REDOUBLE SACRIFICIAL HIGHLY MERITORIOUS EFFORTS CONCENTRATE THEIR ATTENTION ON ALL-IMPORTANT TEACHING ACTIVITIES DESTINED CARRY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S WORLD-REDEEMING FAITH INTO LONG-AWAITED PERIOD UNIVERSAL RESPONSE HIS LIFE-GIVING CALL.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

58

Success of Collaboration with Network on Conservation and Religion

4 NOVEMBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

- 58.1 FULLY ONE YEAR SINCE ACCEPTANCE BAHÁ'Í FAITH INTO NETWORK ON CONSERVATION AND RELIGION OF WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE, WE ARE IMMENSELY PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE OUTSTANDING SUCCESS FUND-RAISING BANQUET AND RECEPTION ON 26 OCTOBER IN LONDON COSPONSORED BY WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE AND BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. HELD AT SYON HOUSE, ANCESTRAL HOME OF DUKES OF NORTHUMBERLAND, EVENT LAUNCHED "ARTS AND NATURE" PROGRAM CONCEIVED BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH, AS MEANS OF DRAWING ON VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS TO ENLIST PUBLIC SUPPORT OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS AROUND WORLD.
- 58.2 AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM, REPRESENTING BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, GAVE CAPTIVATING BRIEF ADDRESS IN WHICH SHE APPEALED TO HER DISTINGUISHED HEARERS TO JOIN IN COMMON EFFORT TO CONSERVE NATURE. IN

HIS SUBSEQUENT SPEECH, PRINCE PHILIP REFERRED REPEATEDLY TO POINTS SHE HAD MADE.

ATTRACTING SOME MOST INFLUENTIAL FIGURES IN BRITISH SOCIAL AND PUBLIC LIFE AMONG ITS 200 GUESTS, EVENT BROUGHT TOGETHER NUMBER OF LEADING EUROPEAN ARTISTS IN PERFORMANCES ON THEME “ART AND NATURE,” WHICH WAS FURTHER HIGHLIGHTED BY DISPLAY AT SYON HOUSE OF WORKS OF ART FROM ROYAL COLLECTION WHICH HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN HAD LOANED FOR THE EVENING. 58.3

OUR SPIRITS STIRRED BY POWERFUL INDICATIONS THUS GIVEN OF GREAT POTENTIALITIES FOR SERVICE WHICH BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE CAN AND MUST RENDER IN MAKING ITS DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSERVATION AND ENRICHMENT PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OUR BOUNTIFULLY ENDOWED PLANET. 58.4

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

59

Execution of Two Bahá’ís in Iran

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. 59.1

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. 59.2

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. 59.3

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 59.4

1988. News of his execution was given to his family on 26 November 1988. He was 55 years old.

59.5 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.

59.6 To date, neither the exact charges, nor the dates of execution nor the places of burial are known for these two latest victims.

59.7 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

60

Individual Rights and Freedoms

29 DECEMBER 1988

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

60.1 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, ^{60.2} 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 ^{60.3} 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."⁶⁰⁻¹ 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."⁶⁰⁻²

Shoghi Effendi, in various statements, celebrated the remarkable ^{60.4} 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,

60-1. PUP, p. 143.

60-2. TDP, no. 11.11.

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.”⁶⁰⁻³ It is the far-reaching, transformative implications of this distinction which we especially invite you to contemplate.

^{60.5} 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.

^{60.6} 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.”⁶⁰⁻⁴ 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.⁶⁰⁻⁵

^{60.7} 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

60-3. ADJ, ¶27.

60-4. GPB, p. 238.

60-5. GWB, no. 70.

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.”⁶⁰⁻⁶

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.”⁶⁰⁻⁷

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,

60-6. WOB, pp. 145, 152.

60-7. WOB, pp. 152–3.

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.”⁶⁰⁻⁸ 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.”⁶⁰⁻⁹ 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.⁶⁰⁻¹⁰ In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His World Order is a reciprocation of that love.

* * *

^{60.11} 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.

^{60.12} 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

60-8. WOB, p. 163.

60-9. WOB, p. 43

60-10. HW, Arabic, no. 3.

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.’”⁶⁰⁻¹¹

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.”⁶⁰⁻¹²

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

60-11. GPB, p. 218.

60-12. KA, ¶123, 125, 124, 125; TB, p. 89.

employment alike of good and evil. Is it any wonder, then, that Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to submission to the will of God?

^{60.16} 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.⁶⁰⁻¹³ Hence whatever in principle is required to realize this purpose gauges the latitudes or limits of freedom.

^{60.17} Contemplating Bahá'u'lláh's warning that “whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence,”⁶⁰⁻¹⁴ 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.”⁶⁰⁻¹⁵

^{60.18} 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.

^{60.19} 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

60-13. *GWB*, no. 109.2.

60-14. *GWB*, no. 110.

60-15. *SWB*, no. 227.27.

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 ^{60.20} 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.

* * *

The equilibrium of responsibilities implied by all this presupposes ^{60.21} 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.

60.22 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."

60.23 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.

* * *

60.24 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.”⁶⁰⁻¹⁶

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.”⁶⁰⁻¹⁷

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

60-16. KI, ¶213; TB, p. 143

60-17. GWB, no. 89.3.

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.

60.28 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.⁶⁰⁻¹⁸

60.29 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.”⁶⁰⁻¹⁹ 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.

60.30 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

60-18. SWAB, no. 45; BWF, p. 406; SWAB, no. 44.

60-19. BWF, p. 411.

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.”⁶⁰⁻²⁰ This was an appeal to the maturity and the distinction towards which he repeatedly directed their thoughts.

* * *

Because the Most Great Peace is the object of our longing, a primary ^{60.31} 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”?⁶⁰⁻²¹

The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, ^{60.32} 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.”⁶⁰⁻²²

Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or national, ^{60.33} 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

60-20. BA, pp. 63–64.

60-21. BA, p. 63.

60-22. LG, no. 288.

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.”⁶⁰⁻²³

^{60.34} 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.

^{60.35} 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.

^{60.36} 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

60-23. LG, no. 288

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.”⁶⁰⁻²⁴ 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.

* * *

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. 60.37

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.”⁶⁰⁻²⁵ 60.38

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 defi- 60.39

60-24. TB, p. 222.

60-25. GPB, p. 219.

nately 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.”⁶⁰⁻²⁶

60.40 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.”⁶⁰⁻²⁷

60.41 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.

* * *

60.42 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.

60.43 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

60-26. SDC, pp. 109–10.
60-27. CC 2:407.

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"?⁶⁰⁻²⁸

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.

60-28. ADJ, ¶60.

60.47 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.

* * *

60.48 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."⁶⁰⁻²⁹

60.49 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.'"⁶⁰⁻³⁰

60-29. PUP, pp. 232–33.

60-30. DG, p. 53.

This relationship, so fundamental to the maintenance of civilized life,^{60.50} 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.”^{60.31}

How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, while the individual^{60.51} 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^{60.52} 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.”^{60.32}

* * *

The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet^{60.53} with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Rev-

60-31. CUHJ, p. 5.

60-32. SDC, pp. 2–3.

elation 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."⁶⁰⁻³³

^{60.54} 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.

^{60.55} 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.

^{60.56} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

61

External Affairs Consultations

5 JANUARY 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

^{61.1} GREATLY PLEASED ANNOUNCE IMPORTANT CONSULTATIONS WORLD CENTER PAST WEEKEND WITH SENIOR OFFICERS BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HOLY LAND, NEW YORK, GENEVA, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF FIVE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES. FAR-REACHING DELIBERATIONS CENTERED ON INCREASED EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES FAITH. MUCH ENCOURAGED EVIDENCES EVER CLOSER TIES COLLABORATION WITH UNITED NATIONS, ITS AGENCIES AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS MANY LANDS, RESULTING EXPANDED SPHERE INFLUENCE FAITH FIELD INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES. HEARTENED BY REVIEW INDICATING INCREASING OP-

60-33. *GWB*, no. 45.

PORTUNITIES SHARE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S WORLD-REDEEMING MESSAGE VAST REGIONS
... SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE. REJOICE IN MOUNTING PRESTIGE CAUSE
GOD WORLDWIDE. INVITE ALL FRIENDS JOIN IN OFFERING PRAYERS THANKSGIVING
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH FOR HIS SUSTAINED ABUNDANT BLESSINGS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

62

Education in the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

23 MARCH 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the vital goals of the Six Year Plan is the education of the believers ^{62.1}
in the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, observance of which has a profound spiritual
effect beyond the practical benefits for the work of the Cause.

The Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí ^{62.2}
Muḥammad Varqá, has, at the request of the Universal House of Justice,
been developing the structure of his Deputies and Representatives around
the world. In addition to their function of receiving Ḥuqúqu'lláh from
the friends, these Deputies and Representatives share with the National
Spiritual Assemblies the responsibility for educating all the believers in this
Law. To achieve the best results there should be close and wholehearted col-
laboration between the National Spiritual Assemblies and the Deputies and
Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in their countries. The House of Justice is
confident that these newly forged links will be greatly strengthened as the
Bahá'í world enters the second half of the Six Year Plan, and assures you all
of its prayers for your confirmation in your efforts to achieve this goal.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

63

Application of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

29 MARCH 1989

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

63.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 5 February 1989 in which you ask whether the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a purely personal law or whether it applies to elected institutions and corporate bodies as well.

63.2 We have been asked to inform you that, although the Trustee is authorized to accept contributions to Ḥuqúqu'lláh from believers who are not under the obligation of paying it, or from companies which are wholly owned by Bahá'ís, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh imposes an obligation only on individual believers, not on Bahá'í institutions or corporate bodies.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

64

Riḍván Message 1989

RIDVÁN 1989

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

64.1 The spiritual current which exerted such galvanic effects at the International Bahá'í Convention last Riḍván has swept through the entire world community, arousing its members in both the East and the West to feats of activity and achievement in teaching never before experienced in any one year. The high level of enrollments alone bears this out, as nearly half a million new believers have already been reported. The names of such far-flung places as India and Liberia, Bolivia and Bangladesh, Taiwan and Peru, the Philippines and Haiti leap to the fore as we contemplate the accumulating evidences of the entry by troops called for in our message of a year ago. These evidences are hopeful signs of the greater acceleration yet to come and in which all national communities, whatever the current status of their teaching effort, will ultimately be involved.

We look back with feelings of humble gratitude and heightened expectations at the stupendous developments which have taken place in so brief a period. One such development has been the adoption of the architectural design conceived by Mr. Fariburz 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. ^{64.2}

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. ^{64.3}

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. ^{64.4}

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.

64.5 In the gladness of the moment, we extend a warm welcome to the two National Spiritual Assemblies being formed this Riḍván: one in Macau in Southeast Asia, the other in Guinea-Bissau in West Africa.

64.6 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.

64.7 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 Center—an institution whose augmented membership has already displayed a verve, a vision and a versatility evocative of warm admiration?

64.8 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.

64.9 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.

64.10 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.

64.11 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.

64.12 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.

64.13 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.”

64.14 Our abiding love, unabating encouragement, constant, fervent prayers accompany you wherever you may go, whatever you may do in service to our beloved Lord.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

65

Restoration of Local Spiritual Assembly of ‘Ishqábád

25 APRIL 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

OVERJOYED ANNOUNCE ELECTION FIRST DAY RIḌVÁN FESTIVAL LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY ‘ISHQÁBÁD. RESTORATION THIS HISTORIC BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY, FOLLOWING ECLIPSE LASTING OVER HALF A CENTURY, SIGNIFIED INITIAL STEP REHABILITATION FAITH THROUGHOUT SOVIET UNION. WE SHALL INFORM NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES IN DUE COURSE WHEN TIME RIPE ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS ESTABLISH FORMAL CONTACTS. OFFERING PRAYERS THANKSGIVING HOLY SHRINES. 65.1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

66

Commencement of Preliminary Phase of Mount Carmel Projects

28 APRIL 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

REJOICE ANNOUNCE COMMENCEMENT GEOLOGICAL SURVEY ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARY STEP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS MOUNT CARMEL. THIS STEP SHARPENS NEED SPEEDY ACCUMULATION FIFTY MILLION DOLLAR RESERVE CALLED FOR PERMIT INITIATION MAJOR WORKS, OF WHICH ONE THIRD SO FAR CONTRIBUTED. URGE SHARE INFORMATION FRIENDS. 66.1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

67

Responsibilities of Individual Believers in the Administrative Order

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 67.1

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.

67.2 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.

67.3 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."⁶⁷⁻¹

67-1. SWAB, no. 44; CC 2:1380.

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.”⁶⁷⁻²

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

67-2. BA, p. 79.

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

68

The Importance of Literacy

10 JULY 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{68.1} 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.

^{68.2} 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."⁶⁸⁻¹ 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

68-1. Revised translation in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide." (¶149)

its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul.”⁶⁸⁻²

The most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word ^{68.3} 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.”⁶⁸⁻³ For this essential reason, in our last Riḍván 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 ^{68.4} 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 ex- ^{68.5}ample 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

68-2. KA, ¶182, 149; GWB, no. 136.2.

68-3. KA, ¶48.

upliftment of individuals and the consolidation of the Bahá'í community as a whole will attract divine favors and confirmations.

68.6 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 Center 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.

68.7 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

69

The Role of the Nineteen Day Feast

27 AUGUST 1989

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

69.1 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.

69.2 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 69.3
 endowed with a power that is not of this world.”⁶⁹⁻¹ 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 69.4
 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 69.5
 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

69-1. SWAB, no. 51.

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.

^{69.6} 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.”⁶⁹⁻²

^{69.7} 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.

^{69.8} 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

69-2. CC 1:957.

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. ^{69.9}

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.”^{69.3} ^{69.10}

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.”^{69.4} It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, gen- ^{69.11}

69-3. CC 1:923.

69-4. The translation used here differs from the final published version in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which appears in ¶157 and reads, “Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.”

erosity 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.

69.12 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.⁶⁹⁻⁵

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

70

Timing of Feast Observances

28 AUGUST 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

70.1 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.

70.2 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.

69-5. CC 1:920.

Second, the administrative portion of the Feast should not be laborious or 70.3
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 bal-
anced 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 70.4
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 70.5
The Nineteen Day Feast,⁷⁰⁻¹ 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

70-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1, pp. 417–58.

71

Assessment of Six Year Plan Pioneer Goals

7 SEPTEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

71.1 On 14 May 1987 we wrote to all National Spiritual Assemblies on behalf of the Universal House of Justice conveying the call for the minimum number of pioneers who were to settle in their goals by Riḍván 1989, together with a call for pioneers to settle in a number of Eastern Bloc countries by the end of the Six Year Plan. This call was supplemented by a letter issued on 5 June 1987, listing the Inter-Assembly Collaboration Projects which had been included in the individual National Plans and which were, for the most part, intended to be pursued throughout the six years of the plan.

71.2 The Bahá'í world has now grown so large, and the flow of pioneers and traveling teachers so constant that it is virtually impossible to keep a detailed up-to-date record of the vast number of projects being undertaken in every country. However, the most recent information that the Department of Statistics has been able to collect presents the following highly encouraging picture of the pioneering goals so far achieved during the Plan.

71.3 During the first year of the Six Year Plan, before the pioneer call of May 1987 was sent out, a large number of believers pioneered, of whom 523 are still at their posts. During the subsequent two years, in answer to the call, 943 believers have settled in goals specified in the Plan or in posts not originally assigned. The total number of international pioneers since April 1986 is thus 1,466. The details of the response to the pioneer call, by continent receiving pioneers, are as follows.

Receiving Area	Assigned Goals	Goals Still Unfilled	Goals Filled	Extra Pioneers to Goals	Pioneers to Other Places	Total Pioneers Received
Africa	100	42	58	56	68	182
Americas	119	45	74	133	38	245
Asia	50	5	45	93	101	239
Australasia	45	18	27	18	28	73
Europe	115	66	49	11	144	204
The World	429	176	253	311	379	943

Of the 176 pioneer goals outstanding, 14 have been canceled in light of 71.4
 changed circumstances and in view of the new call for short-term pioneers
 described below. There remains, therefore, the immediate task for the Bahá'í
 world to fill the 162 pioneer posts remaining vacant from the original pioneer
 call and, indeed, to increase the flow of long-term pioneers to needy areas. In
 addition to these, the tremendous recent acceleration in the twin processes of
 expansion and consolidation calls for a new flexibility in meeting the needs in
 the field. Therefore, to supplement the work of pioneers and traveling teach-
 ers, the Universal House of Justice is now calling for a range of short-term
 pioneer projects during the remaining years of the Six Year Plan.

These short-term pioneer goals are being assigned in terms of months per 71.5
 pioneer. In other words, a goal of 24 could mean one pioneer for two years
 or two pioneers for twelve months or even four pioneers for six months each.
 We can also envisage that special circumstances may warrant a succession of
 short-term pioneers for terms as short as three months. These services could
 run either concurrently or one after the other. The idea is that they should
 be for longer periods than can normally be spent by a traveling teacher but,
 since the short-term pioneer does not have the aim of settling permanently
 in his post, he will, generally, be freed of the need to find employment,
 and so will probably obtain a visa more easily and will also be able to spend
 his time in remote areas which the homefront teachers and the long-term
 pioneers find it difficult to reach or on specific tasks which others are unable
 to perform for lack of time or other reasons.

Many of the short-term pioneers may be able to cover their own expend- 71.6
 es; others will need financial help from the responsible National Spiritual
 Assemblies or the International Deputization Fund. All will need proper
 preparation for their service and orientation both before and after they arrive
 in their goal countries.

The responsibility for sending short-term pioneers has been assigned to 71.7
 specific National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that volunteers are found
 and placed in the field. But such Assemblies do not necessarily have to draw
 the pioneers from their own communities. Volunteers may arise from com-
 munities which have no assigned goals, or from countries which neighbor
 the goal areas. The services of all these can be used and will count towards
 the achievement of the goals. The assistance and advice of the Continental
 Pioneer Committees can be sought in this regard.

Enclosed are two lists, one in the order of National Assemblies to receive 71.8
 assistance, the other in the order of National Assemblies which have the

responsibility to send it. It will be noted that no goals are included for the countries of the Eastern Bloc; these are being dealt with separately in view of the unprecedented opportunities, great urgency and special conditions of the work there.

71.9 The Universal House of Justice will pray in the Holy Shrines that the believers in every land will arise with increasing determination to speed the process of entry by troops and the establishment of firmly grounded, efficiently functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

72

The Function of Review in the Bahá'í Community

25 SEPTEMBER 1989

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

72.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter . . . 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. . . .

72.2 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. 72.3

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. 72.4

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. 72.5

The House of Justice hopes that these points will clarify your thoughts on the function of review in the Bahá'í community. 72.6

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

73

Encouraging the Holding of Feasts

26 SEPTEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

73.1 The International Teaching Center has recently asked the Universal House of Justice about the possibility of direct involvement of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants in encouraging the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts in communities where the Local Spiritual Assembly is not exercising its responsibilities in this regard. The House of Justice responded as follows.

73.1a As you rightly point out, in many such communities the fostering of the Feast is an effective aid to community development. Feasts may, in turn, lead to other activities such as children's classes, and gradually help in the activation of the Local Assembly. Assistants may therefore assume the important role of encouraging the believers to gather for the Feast as an interim measure when the Local Spiritual Assembly is not functioning, although the Nineteen Day Feast can be an official administrative occasion only when there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it. Indeed groups, spontaneous gatherings of the friends, and even isolated believers may certainly observe the Feast.

73.1b It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the goal is for the Local Assembly to be strengthened in order that it may itself assume responsibility to conduct the Feast.

73.2 It would be appropriate for you to consult with the Counselors about the matter. The Auxiliary Board members and their assistants can do a great deal to assist.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

74

Passing of Roddy Lutchmaya, Continental Counselor

9 OCTOBER 1989

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

DEEPLY GRIEVED SUDDEN UNTIMELY DEATH DEVOTED PROMOTER FAITH ROD- 74.1
DY LUTCHMAYA. HIS INCESSANT INTENSIVE EFFORTS TEACHING FIELD MAURITIUS
FROM EARLY YEARS ESTABLISHMENT FAITH THAT ISLAND, HIS LONG RECORD AD-
MINISTRATIVE SERVICES ON NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY, CULMINATING IN HIS
MEMBERSHIP ON BOARD OF COUNSELORS IN AFRICA, WILL ALWAYS BE LOVINGLY
REMEMBERED. HIS HUMILITY, STEADFASTNESS, PERSEVERANCE UNFORGETTABLE.
HIS REWARD ABHÁ KINGDOM UNDOUBTEDLY BOUNTIFUL. MAY RISING GENERA-
TION BAHÁ'ÍS ISLANDS INDIAN OCEAN FOLLOW HIS NOBLE FOOTSTEPS.

PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL. CALLING FOR SPECIAL 74.2
MEMORIAL GATHERINGS MOTHER TEMPLE KAMPALA AND IN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES
THROUGHOUT AFRICAN CONTINENT. CONVEY RELATIVES HEARTFELT SYMPATHY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

75

Appointment of European Bahá'í Youth Council

20 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Europe

Announce appointment first European Bahá'í Youth council with follow- 75.1
ing members: Onno Frank van Bekkum, Morten Bergsmo, Nadi Hofmann,
Alessandra Lanfranconi, John McGill, Bahiyyih Tahzib, Robert Weinberg.

Duties Council will include coordination those activities European 75.2
Bahá'í Youth having continental impact; assistance and advice to Continen-
tal Board of Counselors, National Spiritual Assemblies and National Bahá'í
Youth Committees on matters related to Bahá'í youth activities; representa-
tion of European Bahá'í youth on continental basis with non-Bahá'í youth
groups and other agencies.

First full meeting Council scheduled for weekend 4 to 6 November 1989 75.3
in London.

Hail this new development Bahá'í youth work, eagerly anticipate great 75.4
enhancement potential for promotion Faith throughout continent. Praying

Holy Shrines outpouring divine bounties confirm initial steps assumption highly meritorious tasks.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

76

Release of a Compilation on Conservation of the Earth's Resources

26 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

76.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *Conservation of the Earth's Resources*, which was prepared by the Research Department at the instruction of the Universal House of Justice for the purpose of assisting the friends in responding to the call, in the Riḍván message, for an increase in Bahá'í activities aimed at supporting endeavors to protect the environment.⁷⁶⁻¹

76.2 The compilation was assembled, primarily, to deepen the believers' appreciation of the Bahá'í concept of nature and to enhance their understanding of both man's relationship to nature and his responsibility to preserve the world's ecological balance. It could also serve as a valuable tool for use with non-Bahá'ís who have some knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith and its approach to the solution of pressing social problems.

76.3 It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the National Spiritual Assemblies will make the material in the compilation available to the believers and that, armed with increased knowledge of this important subject, the friends will be inspired to lend their assistance to those who are striving to make this world "an earthly paradise."⁷⁶⁻²

76.4 With great pleasure the House of Justice takes this opportunity to announce the establishment of an Office of the Environment, which will conduct the external relations of the Bahá'í International Community with regard to environmental matters. Thus it will foster relations with the World Wide Fund for Nature and other like-minded nongovernmental organiza-

76-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1, pp. 65–92.

76-2. SWAB, no. 220.1.

tions and will work in collaboration with the Office of Social and Economic Development. The new Office operates alongside the other offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York, namely, the United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

77

Appointment of New Continental Counselor

30 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The untimely passing of Mr. Roddy Lutchmaya on 25 September 1989 ^{77.1} left a vacancy on the Continental Board of Counselors in Africa. By the appointment of Mr. Gilbert Robert of Réunion to membership of that Board we have now filled this vacancy.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

78

Formalities of Membership in the Bahá'í Community

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 ^{78.1} 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. ^{78.2}

78.3 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.

78.4 As you indicate in your letter, the process of issuing an enrollment card is a separate, purely formal, step that follows the above decision.

78.5 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

79

A National Spiritual Assembly's Relations with Government

20 NOVEMBER 1989

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guyana

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

79.1 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.

79.2 In general, the manner in which the principle of noninterference in political affairs should be applied in Guyana depends upon your ap-

praisal 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) 79.3

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*. . . . 79.4

The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Holy Shrines for your guidance and for the reinforcement of your devoted endeavors. 79.5

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

80

Message to the International Teaching Conference Dedicated to the Hand of the Cause of God

Dr. Muhájir

28 NOVEMBER 1989

To the Friends gathered at the Teaching Conference dedicated to the memory of the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Raḥmátu'lláh Muhájir c/o The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ecuador
Dearly loved Friends,

80.1 As our hearts turn to your assemblage, we are moved to recall the remarkable spirit of Dr. Muhájir, whose presence is surely felt by all of you gathered on this occasion.

80.2 Dr. Muhájir was a man of vision, who had an extraordinary ability to recognize the practical needs of the community, but he was also a man of action, and his greatest dream was that the masses of humanity would soon awaken to the call of Bahá'u'lláh. He well understood that the greatest gift that Bahá'u'lláh has given us is the privilege to become instruments through which other souls are touched by His healing message. If we offer ourselves in the right manner, if we make selfless efforts, if we arise with love and with courage, then our services and sacrifices will be confirmed and many seeking souls will find eternal life. Thus the Cause of God will blossom before our eyes.

80.3 Dr. Muhájir has left a great legacy, and by the grace of God his earthly remains repose in Latin America, in a land and amongst a people that he loved so much. We earnestly pray that the memory of his indomitable spirit will inspire all of those present at this International Conference to arise and follow his noble example by offering enthusiastic and humble service during the yearlong teaching plan that has been dedicated to his memory.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

81

Release of a Compilation on the Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections

10 DECEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice feels it is timely to release a compilation ^{81.1} on Bahá'í elections as a useful tool to help National Spiritual Assemblies to increase the understanding of the believers regarding the nature and sanctity of these elections, and to prepare themselves for the expected rapid increase in the number of believers. A compilation entitled *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections* has been prepared by the Research Department, and a copy is attached.⁸¹⁻¹

The study of this compilation will require careful and sustained planning ^{81.2} by the National Spiritual Assemblies and Local Spiritual Assemblies, and it should become part of the ongoing program for the deepening of the friends in the fundamentals of Bahá'í administration. The House of Justice urges all National Spiritual Assemblies to discuss the implementation of such a program with the Counselors, so that the rank and file of the believers, with the wholehearted support of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, will appreciate the importance of adhering to Bahá'í principles in this regard, and carry out all Bahá'í elections, on the national as well as the unit and local levels, in an exemplary manner, in full harmony with the spirit of purity and sanctity which must characterize them.

The Universal House of Justice wishes to stress at this point how important ^{81.3} it is for all delegates allocated to the National Convention to be elected and the desirability of having all the elected delegates attend this vital national event. It has been noticed that, although attendance at most National Conventions is gradually improving, in several countries every year not all delegates are being elected, and in numerous instances, even when elected, they do not participate either in person or by sending in their ballots.

81-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 3, pp. 139–53.

81.4 Be assured of ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your resolute efforts to improve the record of devoted and enthusiastic participation in delegate elections, National Conventions and Local Assembly elections will attract the assistance and blessings of the divine Concourse.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

82

Message to the World Forestry Charter Gathering

II DECEMBER 1989

World Forestry Charter Gathering, Savoy Hotel, London

82.1 May the noble aspirations of those working to protect and restore the world's forests, among whom Richard St. Barbe Baker was so outstanding an advocate, be given further impetus by the World Forestry Charter Gathering. May your actions become increasingly collaborative and unified in nature.

82.2 Efforts such as yours to reverse the deterioration of our natural environment reveal a growing awareness that solutions must embrace a global perspective in order to be effective.

82.3 "The earth," as Bahá'u'lláh stated a century ago, "is but one country and mankind its citizens."⁸²⁻¹

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

83

Progress of the Mount Carmel Projects

23 JANUARY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

83.1 KINDLY CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS NEWS PROGRESS HISTORIC MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

83.2 FOLLOWING STRENUOUS DETAILED NEGOTIATIONS, TOWN PLANNING SCHEME ESSENTIAL FOR INITIATION OF PROJECTS WAS OFFICIALLY APPROVED BY LOCAL

82-1. GWB, no. 117.

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 RIḌVÁN MESSAGE, REQUIRED FOR DESIGN FOUNDATIONS BUILDINGS ARC, NOW COMPLETED. 83.3

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. 83.4

OF \$50,000,000 CALLED FOR AS ESSENTIAL RESERVE FOR INITIATION CONSTRUCTION, APPROXIMATELY \$26,000,000 SO FAR CONTRIBUTED. REMAINING SUM NOW URGENTLY NEEDED. 83.5

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. 83.6

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

84

Establishment of Special Two Year Plan for Eastern Europe and Asia

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. 84.1

TION IN LIFE-GIVING ENTERPRISES BEING PURSUED BY INHERITORS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S RESPLENDENT REVELATION.

84.2 REJOICE THEREFORE ANNOUNCE LAUNCHING AT RIḌVÁN 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 RIḌVÁN 1992.

84.3 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. . . .

84.4 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

85

Establishment of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace

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.” 85.1

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.’” 85.2

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 85.3

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.”⁸⁵⁻¹ On that day, we shall witness an expansion and consolidation of the community as has not yet been experienced.

^{85.4} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

86

Fiftieth Anniversary of the Passing of May Maxwell

22 FEBRUARY 1990

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Argentina

^{86.1} EXTEND HEARTFELT GREETINGS INTERNATIONAL GATHERING COMMEMORATING FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY PASSING MASTER'S BELOVED HANDMAID DISTINGUISHED DISCIPLE MAY MAXWELL. SOLEMN OCCASION EVOKES MEMORIES MAGNETIC INFLUENCE EXERTED UPON HER BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ COURSE HER VISIT 'AKKÁ COMPANY FIRST GROUP WESTERN PILGRIMS. BRILLIANT RECORD HER UNFORGETTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS CROWNED PRICELESS HONOR MARTYR'S DEATH DESTINED REMAIN FOREVER IDENTIFIED WITH SPIRITUAL AWAKENING LATIN PEOPLES BOTH OLD AND NEW WORLDS. HER GLORIOUS SACRIFICE FORGED VITAL IMPERISHABLE LINK BETWEEN CHIEF EXECUTORS DIVINE PLAN IN LAND HER BIRTH, THEIR PRINCIPAL ALLY IN HER ADOPTED CANADIAN HOMELAND, AND THEIR RIGHTFUL ASSOCIATES IN LATIN AMERICA, SCENE OF HER FINAL EXPLOITS. HOPE EXPRESSED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI THAT HER NOBLE EXAMPLE WOULD INSPIRE OTHERS ARISE FOLLOW IN HER FOOTSTEPS AND THUS GLADDEN HER SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM ABUNDANTLY REALIZED BY DYNAMIC EPOCH-MAKING SERVICES BELIEVERS WESTERN HEMISPHERE DURING FIVE DECADES SINCE HER PASSING. SINGULAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS LATIN AMERICAN BELIEVERS BOTH AT HOME AND IN FOREIGN FIELDS CONSTITUTE MEMORABLE CHAPTER HISTORY THIS PERIOD FORMATIVE AGE FAITH. THEIR PRESENT GROWING INVOLVEMENT WITH TEACHING VICTORIES IN AFRICA AND EASTERN EUROPE AS WELL AS WORTHY SERVICES OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICAN BE-

85-1. ESW, p. 26; CC 2:1823; CF, p. 9; CC 1:511.

LIEVERS WORLD CENTER FAITH FURTHER ENHANCE THEIR NOTABLE CONTRIBUTION ADVANCEMENT CAUSE LORD OF HOSTS. MAY CONFERENCE HELD CLOSE PROXIMITY HER ILLUMINED RESTING-PLACE AND BLESSED THROUGH PRESENCE AND INSPIRATION MRS. MAXWELL'S HIGHLY ESTEEMED DAUGHTER HAND CAUSE GOD AMATU'L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM RELEASE NEW WAVES SPIRITUAL ENERGY CHARGE PARTICIPANTS FULLER VISION IMPLICATIONS MOMENTOUS WORLD MISSION LATIN AMERICAN BAHÁ'ÍS AS IMPLIED BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S CALL TO PRESIDENTS AMERICAN REPUBLICS IN HIS MOST HOLY BOOK. ARDENTLY SUPPLICATING HOLY SHRINES FRESH OUTPOURINGS SUSTAINING GRACE ENABLE FRIENDS WIN EVER GREATER PRIZES REMAINING MONTHS SIX YEAR PLAN.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

87

Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God Jalal Khazeh

25 FEBRUARY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
To all Hands of the Cause of God
To all Boards of Counselors

DEEPLY GRIEVED ANNOUNCE PASSING STAUNCH TIRELESS PROMOTER FAITH ^{87.1} HAND CAUSE GOD JALAL KHAZEH. HIS STRENUOUS ENDEAVORS CRADLE FAITH HOLY LAND LATIN AMERICA AND WORLDWIDE TRAVELS AFTER PASSING BELOVED GUARDIAN SET SHINING EXAMPLE OF UNSHAKEABLE DEDICATION AND COURAGE, OF UNDEVIATING LOYALTY AND PERSEVERANCE. IMPERISHABLE RECORD HIS STERLING SERVICES AS GIFTED TEACHER DEFENDER CAUSE NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN. HIS NOBLE SPIRIT NOW ABHÁ KINGDOM WILL UNDOUBTEDLY INTERCEDE BEHALF PERSIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY WHOSE VITAL INTERESTS HE SERVED WITH SUCH HIGH DISTINCTION OVER SEVERAL DECADES. FERVENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES FOR PROGRESS HIS ILLUMINED SOUL IN REALMS ON HIGH. ADVISE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS HONOR PARTICULARLY ALL HOUSES OF WORSHIP.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

88

Appointment of Continental Pioneer Committees

17 APRIL 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

88.1 The Universal House of Justice has reviewed the membership of all Continental Pioneer Committees and has made new appointments. The list of members is attached, along with statements of the present-day purpose and character of the Committees and of their functions.

88.2 These Committees stand ready to help you with any problems you may have in planning the travels of teachers or the settlement of pioneers, and you are urged to make full use of their services. You should especially note the provisions which have been made for access to the International Depu-tization Fund in the financing of budgets for teachers and pioneers when necessary.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Continental Pioneer Committees

A statement on their present-day purpose and character
(January 1990)

88.3 Attached to this statement is a list of the functions of the Continental Pioneer Committees, as revised to reflect the current stage in the develop-ment of these Committees, the growing needs and opportunities of the Faith in the fields of pioneering (long-term and short-term) and traveling teaching, the increasing importance of close collaboration between the Committees and the Continental Counselors, and the cooperation of both with the National Spiritual Assemblies.

88.4 With the rapid increase of opportunities opening at this period all over the world for teaching the Faith to the masses of humanity, it has become essential that all possible measures be taken to ensure the swift, effective mobilization of pioneers, both long-term and short-term, and of interna-tional traveling teachers to meet the needs of every national community. The Continental Pioneer Committees serve as agencies, supplemental to the direct involvement of National Spiritual Assemblies in sending and re-ceiving such manpower, by which every believer who arises for the service of

Bahá'u'lláh may be sure of receiving the prompt, comprehensive guidance and assistance which he may need in carrying out his intention.

If pioneers and traveling teachers are to enter the field of service as rapidly, continuously, and effectively as the current historic hour demands, it is vital that the believers and institutions concerned are fully conversant with those instruments which have been created to serve their needs and with the methods and lines of communication which should be utilized. The Continental Pioneer Committees are one such instrument. This statement is designed to clarify their specific role in the process, to define their areas of responsibility, and to stipulate the resources at their disposal. 88.5

The functions of the Continental Pioneer Committees have been modified to relieve the Committees, to some extent, of the information-gathering duties formerly assigned to them, to focus more on their duties as executive agencies in charge of facilitating pioneer and traveling teaching projects, to stress again to both the Committees and the Continental Boards of Counselors that close, creative interaction between the two institutions is an indispensable element in the application of the manpower resources of the Cause to the requirements of national Bahá'í communities, and to remind the National Spiritual Assemblies that they have access to the services of the International Teaching Center and the International Deputization Fund through the channel of the Continental Pioneer Committees and that these Committees are ever ready to assist them in the settlement of pioneers and the implementation of traveling teaching projects. 88.6

It is our particular hope that from time to time it may be possible for either the full membership, or at least the Secretary, of each Continental Pioneer Committee to meet with the Continental Board of Counselors in its region for consultation concerning the needs and possibilities of the continent in regard to pioneers and traveling teachers. The purpose of such consultation would be to ensure that areas where manpower is needed are quickly identified and all possible steps are taken to fill these needs. The Continental Boards of Counselors, with the Auxiliary Board members and the Continental Pioneer Committees, should likewise be alert to the need of cooperation with National Spiritual Assemblies in the orientation and briefing of pioneers and traveling teachers. 88.7

The Continental Pioneer Committees have been granted funds by the International Teaching Center with which to initiate or support traveling teaching projects which they themselves see are useful and needed. In addition, they constitute the correct avenue by means of which the National 88.8

Spiritual Assemblies can apply for assistance from the International Deputization Fund for the support of either pioneer or traveling teaching projects. It is particularly important that this function of the Continental Pioneer Committees in regard to budgetary assistance be fully understood by both the National Spiritual Assemblies and the believers generally, especially insofar as it relates to the newly instituted short-term pioneer projects.

88.9 In the past, some of the Continental Pioneer Committees have found it useful to appoint a small number of regional representatives, in key distant locations of their continent, who have assisted them in the prompt discharge of their duties. This possibility is still open for the Committees to explore.

88.10 One of the most important aspects of this subject is the requirement for the rapid and accurate exchange of information needed to facilitate the movement and utilization of those believers who wish to join the ranks of pioneers and traveling teachers. The Continental Pioneer Committees require the full support and prompt cooperation of both the Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies in the discharge of their vital functions. In turn, these institutions should be able to depend on the reliability, experience, and knowledge of the Continental Pioneer Committees.

89

Deputizing Pioneers for the End of the Six Year Plan

20 APRIL 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

89.1 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:

89.1a 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 mighti-

est structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded. . . .⁸⁹⁻¹

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.^{89.2}

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.^{89.3}

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.^{89.4}

Responsibility for the administration of this Fund has been assigned to the International Teaching Center 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^{89.5}

89-1. GWB, no. 96.3.

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.

^{89.6} 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

90

Ridván Message 1990

RIDVÁN 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dearly loved Friends,

^{90.1} 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 ^{90.2} 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 ^{90.3} 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.

^{90.4} Nor have the Counselor members of the International Teaching Center 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.

^{90.5} 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, reinstated 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 ^{90.6} 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 ^{90.7} 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 Center. This paves the way for the ultimate issuance of building permits.

Beloved Friends: Merely two years separate us from the conclusion of the ^{90.8} Six Year Plan and the beginning at Riḍván 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 ^{90.9} 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.

90.10 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."

90.11 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.

90.12 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.

90.13 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. ^{90.14}

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."⁹⁰⁻¹ 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. ^{90.15}

90-1. CF, p. 117.

90.16 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.

90.17 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.

90.18 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 ^{90.19} 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, ^{90.20} 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 ^{90.21} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

91

Commencement of Work on Extension of Terraces on Mount Carmel

24 MAY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

91.1 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 RÚHÍYIYH 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.

91.2 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.

91.3 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

92

Completion of the Restoration of the North Wing of the House of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá

19 JUNE 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

REJOICE ANNOUNCE COMPLETION RESTORATION NORTH WING OF HOUSE OF ^{92.1}
‘ABDU’LLÁH PÁSHÁ IN ‘AKKÁ PERMITTING FIRST VISIT ADDITIONAL AREA THIS HOLY
PLACE BY CURRENT GROUP PILGRIMS ON SEVENTEENTH JUNE. WING CONTAINS
HALL IN WHICH ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HELD FEASTS AND OTHER GATHERINGS AND ALSO
ROOM OCCUPIED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI DURING BOYHOOD, BOTH ROOMS BEFIT-
TINGLY FURNISHED BY AMATU’L-BAHÁ RŪĤÍYYIH KHÁNUM.

JOYFUL EVENT COINCIDED LETTING CONTRACT MAJOR WORKS EXTENSION ^{92.2}
MAIN TERRACE OF SHRINE OF THE BÁB. THIS INITIAL STAGE CONSTRUCTION TER-
RACES, COSTING APPROXIMATELY 550,000 DOLLARS, DUE TO BE COMPLETED IN
FOUR MONTHS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

93

Passing of Hedayatoullah Ahmadiyah, Continental Counselor

29 AUGUST 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in the Americas

PROFOUNDLY DEPLORE TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES SUDDEN PASSING DEARLY ^{93.1}
LOVED, WHOLLY DEVOTED, INDEFATIGABLE SERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH HEDAYATOU-
LAH AHMADIYEH. HIS CONSTANT PROMOTION SACRED CAUSE THROUGH HIS IN-
TENSIVE IMMENSELY SUCCESSFUL INVOLVEMENT TEACHING WORK INCLUDING
HIS AUTHORSHIP WIDELY USED TEACHING BOOKLET WAS AT CORE HIS DYNAMIC
SERVICES AS CONTINENTAL COUNSELOR IN AMERICAS, AS MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN
FOR MANY YEARS OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY BELIZE AND AS PIONEER DUR-
ING HIS YOUTHFUL YEARS IRAN. OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS HIS EXTENSIVE
TEACHING TRIPS THROUGH CENTRAL, NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA WILL FOR-
EVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH BRILLIANT CHAPTERS DEVELOPMENT FAITH THESE AR-
EAS. DEEPLY SYMPATHIZE MEMBERS HIS BELOVED FAMILY WHOSE WHOLEHEARTED
SUPPORT HIS ACTIVITIES WAS EXEMPLARY. PRAYING HOLY THRESHOLD THAT HIS

SOUL MAY RECEIVE RICH REWARDS MAY BE IMBUEWED WITH ETERNAL HAPPINESS THROUGHOUT DIVINE WORLDS.

- 93.2 ADVISING MEMORIAL SERVICES BE HELD TEMPLES PANAMA CITY AND WILMETTE AND IN COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT AMERICAS IN HIS HONOR.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

94

Release of a Compilation on Teaching Prominent People

28 SEPTEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 94.1 The Universal House of Justice draws to your attention that portion of the most recent Riḍván message in which the friends throughout the world are asked to focus on the need to attract people of capacity and prominence to the Faith. Because of the emphasis the House of Justice wishes the friends to place on this matter, the Research Department was asked to prepare a compilation of texts on the subject. The compilation is now ready and a copy is enclosed.⁹⁴⁻¹

- 94.2 It is the ardent prayer of the House of Justice that careful study of the passages included will assist the believers to appreciate the importance of fostering cordial relations with accomplished and distinguished figures, with people of capacity and with those occupying prominent positions in society. The aim of the believers should be to make of them friends of the Faith, dispelling any misconceptions they may have and unfolding before their eyes the vision of world solidarity and peace enshrined in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends should be confident that the spiritually minded and receptive souls among such people will eventually accept the truth of the Bahá'í Revelation and join the ranks of its active supporters.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

94-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 2, pp. 257–80.

95

Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God Collis Featherstone

30 SEPTEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

DEEPLY GRIEVED ANNOUNCE PASSING VALIANT HAND CAUSE GOD COLLIS 95.1
FEATHERSTONE WHILE VISITING KATHMANDU, NEPAL COURSE EXTENSIVE JOURNEY
ASIA.

HIS NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS STAUNCH, FEARLESS DEFENDER COV- 95.2
ENANT; HIS UNCEASING COMMITMENT PROPAGATION CAUSE ALL PARTS WORLD,
ESPECIALLY PACIFIC REGION, HIS UNREMITTING PERSEVERANCE FOSTERING ESTAB-
LISHMENT LOCAL, NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER, HIS EXEM-
PLARY DEVOTION TO WRITINGS FAITH, HIS OUTSTANDING PERSONAL QUALITIES
UNSWERVING LOYALTY, ENTHUSIASM, ZEAL AND DEDICATION, DISTINGUISH HIS
MANIFOLD SERVICES THROUGHOUT MANY DECADES.

OFFERING PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES BOUNTIFUL REWARD HIS RADIANT SOUL 95.3
ABHÁ KINGDOM. ADVISE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL
GATHERINGS, PARTICULARLY IN MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁRS, RECOGNITION HIS MAG-
NIFICENT ACHIEVEMENTS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

96

Means for Assisting a Traumatized World

24 OCTOBER 1990

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter We have 96.1
been directed to convey the following on its behalf.

The several issues raised in your letter are best considered in light of 96.2
the insights conveyed in the Bahá'í teachings about the manner in which
the innumerable problems of an ailing society can best be resolved and its
distressing condition ameliorated.

Bahá'u'lláh has stated in His Tablet to Queen Victoria: 96.3

- 96.3a 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.⁹⁶⁻¹
- 96.4 The well-being of humanity is a reflection of its spiritual state, and any enduring change for the better in its material affairs requires a change in its spiritual condition. For this reason the principal concern and contribution of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh is the spiritual transformation of human society, with full confidence that by this means they are making a most valuable and most fundamental contribution to the betterment of the world and the rectification of its many problems.
- 96.5 It is the responsibility of the institutions of the Faith to assist the believers in their endeavors to acquire an accurate and profound understanding of the indissoluble connection between their efforts to propagate the Faith and consolidate its institutions and their commendable desire to contribute to improvement in the quality of human life. They should realize also that their approach to the solution of the world's problems will not be understood, and may even be disparaged by the idealistic materialists whose labors are directed so assiduously to improvement in the material welfare of humanity, and to whom material good is the only standard by which the condition of society is assessed. The Universal House of Justice has stated on an earlier occasion that:
- 96.5a . . . 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,

96-1. SH, ¶176.

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 of human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.⁹⁶⁻²

Such a perspective does not mean that Bahá'ís should avoid doing what-^{96.6}ever they can to help others and alleviate human distress, or that they should not associate with and support suitable like-minded organizations. On the contrary, the believers should, at all times, be alert to opportunities to do whatever is within their power to make the conditions of human life better; by this means they will manifest that commitment to action exemplified by the Master, will demonstrate the relevance of Bahá'í principles to the issues of contemporary society, and will attract the receptive and discerning to the Bahá'í teachings. In so doing they should keep clearly in mind that the ultimate purpose is to hasten the establishment and triumph of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh within which resides the power to heal the ills of the world and to establish a world civilization.

Not only is the Bahá'í perspective unique, so too are the methods used^{96.7} by the believers to achieve their objectives. Unity and cooperation are important values which should be the watchwords for activities in which the believers engage. As a consequence, Bahá'ís eschew the adversarial approach of dispute and confrontation, and seek rather the methods of consultation, with its commitment to informed discussion and mutual respect, and with its goal the achievement of consensus in the pursuit of truth. Bahá'ís aim to persuade others of the correctness of their views through their example and the use of reason, and shun the techniques of pressure, condemnation and abuse which are a deplorable feature of much of the present-day quest for social justice.

96-2. MUHJ, no. 151.7.

96.8 The injunction to avoid participation in political controversies, identification with political pursuits, or involvement in partisan political affairs is binding on all believers, whether they act as individuals or as representatives of the Bahá'í community. Within those bounds, there is a wide range of possible activities open to them in participating with other groups which aim to promote measures entirely in accord with the Bahá'í principles, such as improvement in race relations, the emancipation of women, conservation of the earth's resources, the promotion of world peace, and so on. The institutions of the Faith are generally subject to a greater restriction in the issues with which they would choose to identify themselves, since their involvement will necessarily have a direct implication for the reputation of the Faith and for its possible misrepresentation by its adversaries.

96.9 These considerations may be used to clarify the specific issues raised in your letter. For example, in light of the Bahá'í approach to the search for truth, it would not be proper for a Bahá'í to become involved in environmental activities which are confrontationalist. The concern of the Tasmanian Bahá'ís for conservation is highly commendable, but they should be aided to find other, more productive, means to express this concern; a study of the recently prepared compilation on conservation of the earth's resources may well be of benefit to them in this regard.⁹⁶⁻³

96.10 In considering whether they should participate in coordinated campaigns such as letter writing, or signing petitions, Bahá'ís should be guided by their Spiritual Assemblies, and are encouraged to accept this guidance in a spirit of radiant acquiescence. The Assemblies should give careful consideration to the motives of the originators of the activity and the methods which are being used. Bahá'ís should avoid contention and strife, and are to be distinguished by their honesty and fair-mindedness, and their respect for the rule of law. They should carefully avoid being involved in partisan activities which are sponsored by a political organization, and are warned to "beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen."⁹⁶⁻⁴

96.11 As your letter points out, there are instances where the Guardian endorsed Bahá'ís identifying themselves with protest activities on vital issues which the

96-3. See CC 1, pp. 65–92.

96-4. WOB, p. 64.

Bahá'í teachings illuminate. It must be remembered that there is an important distinction between protest against attitudes and practices prevalent in some quarters of society and protest antagonistic to the government. The Bahá'í Faith directs its attention principally to the promotion of attitudinal change consequent to acceptance of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh, confident that the transformation of attitudes and values will, in due course, yield its fruit in measures which will resolve the problems with which humanity is now burdened.

The Universal House of Justice appreciates the serious attention you are giving to providing appropriate guidance to the believers as they seek to steer their course around the many hazards and pitfalls associated with this transitional stage in human affairs. Understanding the Bahá'í approach is facilitated by a deep appreciation of the implications of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, destined to evolve from the present-day Administrative Order; this divinely ordained system is an expression of the social reorganization of humanity far beyond the conception of present-day political and social movements whose aim is no more than to repair a lamentably defective order which is fundamentally incapable of meeting the needs of the new age into which humanity is being irresistibly propelled. ^{96.12}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

97

Appointment of Continental Boards of Counselors

25 OCTOBER 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It gives us great pleasure to announce the membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors as from the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1990. The number of continental Counselors remains at 72, but adjustments have been made in their geographical distribution in consonance with the development of the Faith around the world. ^{97.1}

The membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors as now appointed is: ^{97.2}

Africa (18 Counselors): Dr. Hushang Ahdieh (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. George Allen, Mrs. Beatrice O. Asare, ^{97.2a}

Mr. Gila Michael Bahta, Mr. Kiser Barnes, Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi, Mr. Mehraz Ehsani, Mr. Friday Ekpe, Mr. Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, Mr. Kassimi Fofana, Mr. Hizzaya Hissani, Mr. Zekrollah Kazemi, Mr. Muḥammad Kebdani, Mr. Daniel Ramoroesi, Mr. Gilbert Robert, Mrs. Edith Senoga, Mrs. Lucretia M. Warren, Mr. Wingi Mabuku.

97.2b

The Americas (17 Counselors): Mr. Eloy Anello, Mr. Gustavo Correa, Mr. Rolf von Czékus, Mrs. Jacqueline Delahunt, Dr. Wilma M. Ellis, Dr. Peter McLaren (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Shapoor Monadjem, Mrs. Linda Neufeld, Mrs. Ruth Pringle, Dr. William Roberts, Mrs. Isabel de Sanchez, Mr. Fred Schechter, Mr. Errol Sealy, Dr. Arturo Serrano, Mr. Alan Smith, Dr. David R. Smith, Mr. Rodrigo Tomás.

97.2c

Asia (17 Counselors): Dr. Sabir Afaqi, Mr. Burhání'd-Dín Afshín, Mr. Faḍil Ardikání, Mr. Jabbar Eidelkhani, Mr. Bijan Farid, Dr. John Fozdar, Mr. David Huang, Mr. Abbas Katirai, Dr. Kim Myung Jung, Mrs. Lee Lee Ludher, Mr. S. Nagaratnam, Dr. Perin Olyai, Mrs. Rose Ong, Mr. Vicente Samaniego, Mrs. Kimiko Schwerin, Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, Mrs. Shantha Sundram (Trustee of the Continental Fund).

97.2d

Australia (10 Counselors): Mr. Ben Ayala, Mrs. Beatrice Benson, Mr. Afemata Moli Chang, Dr. Kamran Eshraghian (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mrs. Violette Haake, Mrs. Tinai Hancock, Mrs. Betra Majmeto, Mrs. Gayle Morrison, Dr. Sírús Naráqí, Mr. Bruce Saunders.

97.2e

Europe (10 Counselors): Mr. Louis Hénuzet, Mr. Foad Kazemzadeh, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlischlegel, Mr. Patrick O'Mara (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Mr. Nabil Perdu, Mrs. Polin Rafat, Dr. Shapour Rassekh, Mr. Paul Semenoff, Dr. Ilhan Sezgin, Mr. Sohrab Youssefian.

97.3

The following eighteen 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. Suhayl Ala'i, Mr. Husayn Ardekani, Justice Richard Benson, Mrs. Isabel de Calderón, Mr. Oloro Epyeru, Dr. Agnès Ghaznavi, Mr. Zabíhu'lláh Gulmuḥammadí, Mr. Robert Harris, Mr. Bharat Koirala, Mr. Lisiata Maka, Mr. Rouhollah Momtazi, Mrs. Ursula Mühlshlegel, Dr. Leo Niederreiter, Mr. Khudáraḥm Paymán, Mr. Masíḥ Rawḥání, Dr. Mihdi Samandari, U Soe Tin, Mr. Michitoshi Zenimoto. ^{97.4}

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. ^{97.5}

Throughout all the continents the influential and energetic services of the Counselors have demonstrated the progressive development of their essential sphere of operation. The effective manner in which they inspire both the believers and institutions with a greater sense of vision and direction; the extensive consultations they carry out with National Spiritual Assemblies in the prosecution of the objectives of the Six Year Plan; the part they play in the vanguard of believers addressing the needs of the supplementary Two Year Plan in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Mongolia and China; the widespread support they offer to the consolidation efforts at the grass roots of the communities through the dedicated untiring efforts of their Auxiliary Board members and their assistants; the steady encouragement they lend to both the enrollment and deepening of youth and children; the generous assistance they extend to the teaching work through the allocation of subvention funds to special projects and the publication and dissemination of Bahá'í literature and audiovisual materials—in all these activities we witness the manifold evidences of the vital role exercised by these high-ranking officers of the Faith in the protection and propagation of the Cause of God. ^{97.6}

We are calling upon the Counselors from all continents to gather at the World Center from 28 December 1990 through 3 January 1991 for a conference to deliberate on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately ahead, as we approach the end of the Six Year Plan and the observance of the Holy Year marking the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and of the inauguration of His Covenant. ^{97.7}

It is our fervent hope that from this Conference will flow a stream of guidance and inspiration to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land, reinforcing a hundredfold their endeavors to achieve the triumph of the Cause of God. ^{97.8}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

98

Formation of New Local Spiritual Assemblies in Eastern Europe and Former USSR

12 NOVEMBER 1990

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

- 98.1 SEVEN MONTHS AFTER LAUNCHING SUPPLEMENTARY TWO YEAR PLAN REJOICE ANNOUNCE FOURTEEN LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES IN SOVIET UNION, PLUS SIX IN ROMANIA WHERE THERE ARE NOW OVER 600 BELIEVERS, AND ONE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY EACH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY AND YUGOSLAVIA. DEVELOPMENT FAITH IN ALL THESE COUNTRIES AS WELL AS IN ALBANIA, BULGARIA, MONGOLIA AND POLAND GOING FORWARD WITH EXTRAORDINARY SPEED, FORMATION MORE LOCAL ASSEMBLIES IN PROCESS OR EXPECTED SHORTLY.
- 98.2 IN HOLY LAND WORK ON TERRACE OF SHRINE OF THE BÁB PROGRESSING. RESERVE REQUIRED FOR COMMENCEMENT WORK ON ARC NOW REACHED \$45,000,000: \$29,000,000 FROM EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS, \$16,000,000 THROUGH TRANSFERS MADE FROM CONTRIBUTIONS TO ҲУҚÚҚУ'ЛЛАҲ AND THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL FUND. IMPERATIVE FULFILL INITIAL GOAL \$50,000,000 FORTHWITH, AND ENSURE ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION \$20,000,000 FOR MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS TO ENABLE WORK PROCEED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.
- 98.3 CONFIDENT INVINCIBLE SPIRIT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH WILL ENABLE HIS FOLLOWERS EVERY LAND MEET CHALLENGE WORLDWIDE EXPANSION CAUSE AND INTERNATIONAL NEEDS OF THE FAITH AT WORLD CENTER.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

99

Message to the Moscow Conference

21 NOVEMBER 1990

To the Friends gathered at the Moscow Conference

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 99.1 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. 99.2a

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 99.2b

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.

99.3 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.

99.4 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:

99.4a "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."⁹⁹⁻¹

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. . . . 99.4b

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.⁹⁹⁻² 99.4c

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. 99.5

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 99.6

99-1. WOB, p. 202.

99-2. WOB, pp. 203, 204.

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.

99.7 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.

99.8 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:

99.8a 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.⁹⁹⁻³

99.9 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

99-3. KA, ¶53.

100

Suspension of Pilgrimage Program

3 DECEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to our letter of 8 October 1990, in view of the continued unsettled conditions in the Middle East, the Universal House of Justice has decided that pilgrimages to the Holy Land up to the end of March 1991 should be canceled. The individual pilgrims scheduled for this period are also being informed. 100.1

For the same reason, the conference for the Counselors which was scheduled to be held in the Holy Land from 28 December 1990 through 3 January 1991 has also been canceled. The House of Justice hopes it will be possible to convene such a conference at a later date. 100.2

The friends should not allow their concern about the situation in these regions to deter them from their efforts to promote the vital interests of the infinitely precious Faith of God. 100.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

101

Message to the Continental Boards of Counselors

20 DECEMBER 1990

To the Continental Boards of Counselors

On the occasion of the initial meetings of your newly reappointed Boards we express to each of your members our abiding love and esteem and the assurance of our fervent prayers at the Holy Shrines for your abounding success in this new term of service. It was with deep regret that we found it necessary to postpone your much anticipated gathering in the Holy Land. Despite this, we feel confident you will draw upon the challenge of the hour to charge yourselves with ever greater feelings of responsibility, to enliven your vision of the clear needs ahead, and to fortify your resolve to unflinchingly carry forward your far-reaching activities, keenly aware of the great role to which you have been called. 101.1

101.2 After some two decades of development, the vital importance of the services of the Counselors is appreciated by institutions and believers alike—a recognition which greatly enhances your possibilities. A brief period of fifteen months separates us from the end of the worldwide Six Year Plan and the supplementary Two Year Plan, and the opening of the Holy Year which will mark the hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Blessed Perfection and of the inauguration of His triumphant Covenant. Many objectives have already been attained. Much beyond our expectations has been accomplished. Numerous and extraordinary achievements still lie within our grasp. May the Counselors, at this urgent and propitious time, through both their inspiration and their example, sustained by the unflinching and energizing confirmations of the hosts on high, rouse and electrify the friends everywhere to perform such heroic and luminous deeds as will strike a worthy and commensurate contrast to the darkening agonies of a world in its travail, and bring the Bahá'í community to the conclusion of its current collective enterprise laden with undreamed-of victories.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

102

Features of Bahá'í Elections and Administration

2 JANUARY 1991

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

102.1 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. . . .

102.2 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. 102.3

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. 102.4

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 102.5

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:

102.5a 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.

102.5b 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.¹⁰²⁻¹

102.6 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 Center, 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.

102.7 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

102-1. DG, p. 24.

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. 102.8

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. 102.9

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. 102.10

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 102.11

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

- 102.11a 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:

- 102.11b 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.

- 102.12 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 102.13 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.”¹⁰²⁻²

You call attention to the conflict of interest and other problems which 102.14 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

102-2. HW, Arabic no. 2.

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.

102.15 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.¹⁰²⁻³

102.16 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.

102.17 In relation to your suggested minimum requirement that reviewers possess the requisite factual competence to perform the reviewing task,

102-3. See no. 60, pp. 102–20.

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. 102.18

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. 102.19

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

103

Safeguarding against Unsettled Conditions in the Middle East

7 JANUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{103.1} We are conscious that the friends around the world are concerned by the unsettled conditions in the Middle East, so we are writing to assure you that we have taken all steps that are necessary to safeguard the essential requirements of the Cause of God.

^{103.2} In January 1981 we addressed a message to all Continental Boards of Counselors through the International Teaching Center, and a copy of that message was shared at the time with all National Spiritual Assemblies. It confirmed that if at any time communication with the World Center would be cut off, the Counselors would, both collectively and individually, assist National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of the normal administration of the Faith by these Assemblies until communications could be restored.

^{103.3} We rely now, as then, on the Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that the all-important work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its institutions will continue with unabated zeal in every part of the world.

^{103.4} On a number of occasions in the history of the Faith the World Center has been threatened by dangers of various kinds, and the knowledge of how the Almighty has preserved the vital interests of His Faith in the past will reinforce the certainty of all the believers that whatever occurs will but serve to carry forward the realization of His immutable purpose for mankind.

^{103.5} We shall remember you all at the Sacred Threshold and shall pray for the bounties of Bahá'u'lláh to guide and sustain you in the execution of your vital responsibilities in the promotion of His Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

104

Formation of Two New National Spiritual Assemblies

9 JANUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

REJOICE ANNOUNCE DECISION ESTABLISH AT RIḌVÁN 1991 TWO NEW NATIONAL 104.1
SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES: ONE FOR THE USSR WITH ITS SEAT IN MOSCOW, AND ONE
FOR ROMANIA WITH ITS SEAT IN BUCHAREST. OFFERING PRAYERS BOUNDLESS
GRATITUDE TO BAHÁ'U'LLÁH FOR OUTPOURING HIS DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

105

Formation of Another New National Spiritual Assembly

20 FEBRUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

OUTSTANDING PROGRESS TEACHING WORK CZECHOSLOVAKIA MOVES US CALL 105.1
FOR ELECTION NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY THAT COUNTRY COMING RIḌVAN.
WITH FORMATION NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES USSR AND ROMANIA ALREADY AN-
NOUNCED, AND THAT OF WEST LEEWARD ISLANDS WITH ITS SEAT IN BASSE TERRE,
ST. KITTS, IN FULFILLMENT GOAL SIX YEAR PLAN, NUMBER OF PILLARS UNIVERSAL
HOUSE OF JUSTICE WILL BE RAISED TO ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FIVE.

WORK MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS CONTINUING WITH UTMOST SPEED IN SPITE 105.2
TROUBLED CONDITIONS MIDDLE EAST. REJOICE ANNOUNCE INITIAL GOAL FIFTY
MILLION DOLLARS FUND THIS PURPOSE NOW ACHIEVED. URGE FRIENDS ALL LANDS
CONTINUE FLOW VITALLY NEEDED FUNDS ENABLE THESE HISTORIC PROJECTS BE
CARRIED FORWARD WITHOUT HESITATION DURING MONTHS AND YEARS IMME-
DATELY AHEAD.

IRRESISTIBLE ADVANCE CAUSE GOD DURING TIMES INTERNATIONAL CRISIS 105.3
STRIKING EVIDENCE DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS. PRAYING FERVENTLY HOLY SHRINES
REALIZATION BRILLIANT VISION FOUNDER FAITH FUTURE MANKIND.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

106

Update on Bahá'ís in Kuwait

4 MARCH 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

- ^{106.1} Offering thanksgiving Blessed Beauty news just received all dear friends Kuwait are safe.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

107

The Holy Year 1992–1993

3 APRIL 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- ^{107.1} Further to the Ridván 1991 message which has already been mailed to you,¹⁰⁷⁻¹ the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey the following advice and information with regard to the forthcoming Holy Year.

- ^{107.2} 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.

- ^{107.3} As was pointed out in the Ridván 1990 message,¹⁰⁷⁻² the two major events being planned should not be the only commemorative activities of the Holy

107-1. See no. 109, pp. 203–5.

107-2. See no. 91, p. 168.

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. 107.4

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. 107.5

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 107.6

'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 well-spring 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.

107.7 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.

107.8 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 Center. We are happy to enclose a copy.

107.9 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.¹⁰⁷⁻³ 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. 107.10

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

108

Ridván Message 1991

RIDVÁN 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. 108.1

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 108.2

107-3. The statement was published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States under the title *Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991).

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."¹⁰⁸⁻¹

^{108.3} 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."¹⁰⁸⁻²

^{108.4} 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."¹⁰⁸⁻³

^{108.5} 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

108-1. WOB, pp. 171, 155.

108-2. WOB, p. 40.

108-3. PUP, pp. 49, 143; CF, p. 32.

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 Rúhíyyih 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. 108.6

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. 108.7

Yet another instance of the growing public appreciation for the penetrating perspectives of the Cause involves the Republic of South Africa, where 108.8

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.

108.9 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.

108.10 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 Center, 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: 108.11

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. 108.11a

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. 108.11b

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. 108.11c

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 108.11d

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.

108.11c

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.

108.12

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 Rīḍván 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. 108.13

May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care. 108.14

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

109

Acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh and the Laws He Has Revealed

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. . . . 109.1

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. 109.2

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 109.3

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.

109.4 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."¹⁰⁹⁻¹

109.5 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."¹⁰⁹⁻² 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.

109-1. TDP, no. 8.8.

109-2. John 10:16 (KJV).

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. 109.6

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. 109.7

With all good wishes,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

110

Message to the Pacific Women's Conference

10 MAY 1991

To the Pacific Women's Conference, 30 May–7 June 1991

One of the most encouraging developments, as a new millennium approaches, is the speed at which women everywhere are arising to assume an equal part with men in the management of the affairs of humankind. For the Bahá'í community this fundamental change in the role played by women is a harbinger of the approach of global peace. Only as the spiritual and intellectual capacities which have found particularly vigorous expression in women are able to exert their proper influence in the life of society will the conditions for lasting global reconciliation emerge. 110.1

For those who share this perception, no area of the world holds greater promise than the nations of the Pacific. Though for the most part small in population and widely separated geographically, your island countries have demonstrated a steadily increasing capacity for creative response to the challenges facing our planet. The Bahá'í communities of this vast region feel a deep sense of pride that they have been able to play a part in this spiritual adventure. 110.2

Be assured of our heartfelt prayers that the consultations on which you are embarked will add another impulse to the irresistible process by which 110.3

women the world over are awakening to the role they alone can play in building a just and peaceful world.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

111

Decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court

27 MAY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

111.1 In the Riḍván message of the Universal House of Justice, reference was made to an extremely significant decision of the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany. Since this decision may be of assistance to National Spiritual Assemblies in other countries where difficulties are experienced in obtaining recognition for the Faith, or where the Spiritual Assemblies meet with complications in acquiring legal incorporation, the House of Justice has instructed us to send you the enclosed three documents:

1. The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court, in German
2. A translation of this decision into English
3. An elucidation of the abbreviations used in the above
4. A brief outline of the background to the decision and indications of its importance, drawing on an article by Dr. Udo Schaefer published in Bahá'í Nachrichten (the newsletter of the German Bahá'í community).

111.2 We should mention that it proved very difficult indeed to translate the decision into English, since the forms and concepts of German Law differ radically from those of English Law. There is often, therefore, no exact equivalence of terminology. Nevertheless, the English translation is sufficiently faithful as to convey a clear impression of the original.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Guiding Principles

for the decision of the Second Senate of 5th February 1991

[Translation—from German]

2 BvR 263/86

1. A community's mere assertion and self-understanding of professing a religion and of being a religious community cannot justify reference for it and its members to the guarantee of religious freedom of Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG; rather it must be a religion and a religious community in fact, according to spiritual content and outward appearance. To examine and determine this in case of dispute is the duty of the organs of the State, of the courts in the final analysis, in application of the ruling of the State's legal system. 111.3

2. 111.4
 - a) To the freedom of religion in the meaning of Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG belongs also the freedom of religious association, arising from this regulation in connection with the relevant Weimar Church Articles included by Art. 140 GG.
 - b) The guarantee of freedom of religious association contains also the freedom to form a religious association and organize according to one's common faith. This does not mean the right to a particular legal form, such as that of an incorporated association or some other form of corporation; what is guaranteed is the possibility of legal existence in some form or other, including participation in general legal proceedings.

Federal Constitutional Court

In the Name of the People

In the Proceedings on the Constitutional Appeal

[Translation—from German]

2 BvR 263/86

1. of the "Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tübingen, with its seat in Tübingen," represented by the Chairman, Mr. S. . . , 111.5
2. of Mr. S. . . , 111.6
3. of Mrs. S. . . , 111.7
4. of Mrs. S. . . 111.8

- Represented by: Attorneys Dr. Michael Uechtritz, Dr. Hans Schlarmann, Birkenwaldstrasse 149, Stuttgart 1 –
- against
- a) the decision of the High State Court Stuttgart of 27 January 1986 - 8 W 252/85 -,
 - b) the decision of the State Court Tübingen of 8 May 1985 - 5 T 34/84 (FGG) -,
 - c) the decision of the District Court Tübingen of 8 December 1983 and of 2 January 1984
- GReg. II 922/83 -

the Federal Constitutional Court - Second Senate - with the participation of Judges

Vice-chairman Mahrenholz,
Böckenförde,
Klein,
Grasshof,
Kruis,
Franssen,
Kirchhof,
Winter

decided on 5 February 1991:

The Decisions of the High State Court Stuttgart of 27 January 1986 - 8 W 252/85 -, of the State Court Tübingen of 8 May 1985 - 5 T 34/84 (FGG) - and of the District Court Tübingen of 8 December 1983 and of 2 January 1984 - GReg. II 922/83 - violate the basic rights of the appellants accorded by Article 4, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Constitution. They are repealed. The case is referred back to the District Court.

The State of Baden-Württemberg has to reimburse the appellants for the necessary expenses.

Reasons

A.

- ^{111.9} Subject of the Constitutional Appeal is the question to what extent Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG requires that the individuality of a religious association, considering and organizing itself as part of a religious community, must be taken into account in the interpretation and application of regulations of corporate law of the Code of Civil Law.

I.

The Religious Community of the Bahá'ís, constituting a religious movement arisen out of Shí'ih Islam, is represented in a multiplicity of countries. It is hierarchically organized and is currently governed by the “Universal House of Justice,” consisting of nine elected members, with its seat in Haifa (Israel). In countries with a considerable number of local communities, a nine-member National Spiritual Assembly is elected annually in an indirect election by the totality of its members. In the Federal Republic of Germany this is established as a registered association; in other countries it makes use of other legal forms of association or incorporation according to the laws valid there. As governing bodies on a local level, Local Spiritual Assemblies also consisting of nine members are elected by the believers of the local community, and are responsible for regulating local affairs. 111.10

II.

1. The appellant under 2) is chairman, the appellants under 3) and 4) were further elected officers of the appellant under 1). On 14 February 1983 the appellant under 2) as chairman of the governing body applied to the District Court Tübingen for registration of the appellant under 1) in the Court's Register of Associations. The By-Laws on which this application is based contain the following regulations, which are significant here: 111.11

Article 2

Purpose of the Association

- I. The purpose of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tübingen is the administration of all the affairs of the Bahá'í Community in Tübingen according to the teachings and administrative principles of the Bahá'í Religion, as they appear in the Appendix following the By-Laws. . . . 111.12
- II. Accordingly the Spiritual Assembly exclusively and directly pursues charitable and religious purposes and purposes of public benefit in the sense of the paragraph on “Tax-favored purposes” in Tax Law.
- III. The Spiritual Assembly acts in a disinterested capacity and does not pursue purposes for its own economic benefit.

Article 3

111.13

Establishment of Membership

I. . . .

II. The members of the Spiritual Assembly are elected by the voting members of the Bahá'í Community from amongst their midst by secret ballot with simple plurality vote, for the duration of one year, or until the election of their successors. This election takes place on 21 April of each year at the Annual Convention of the Bahá'í Community. Details are regulated by Article 10.

III. . . .

Article 4

111.14

Termination of membership

I. Membership is terminated

by the expiration of time and new election of the Spiritual Assembly, by resignation, by removal, by leaving the Bahá'í Community of Tübingen.

II. The removal of a member of the Spiritual Assembly falls within the competence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany.

Article 5

111.15

By-Election

I. Vacancies in the membership of the Spiritual Assembly are replaced by election at a special meeting of the Bahá'í Community duly called by the Spiritual Assembly for this purpose. As long as the number of members of the Spiritual Assembly does not fall below 5, its decision-making competence is maintained.

II. If the number of vacancies is higher than four, so that the Spiritual Assembly is no longer competent to make decisions, the election is carried out under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Article 9

111.16

Meeting of the members

I. . . .

II. All subsequent meetings are called informally (in writing, by telephone or orally) by the Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly at the request of the Chairman or, if he is prevented, by the Vice-chairman, or at the request of three members of the Assembly or by decision of the Assembly in advance. . . .

III. . . .

IV. . . .

Article 11

The National Spiritual Assembly

111.17

I. The institution superior to all the Spiritual Assemblies in the Federal Republic is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany e.V.

It decides

- a) . . . and b) . . . ;
- c) about the area of jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly;
- d) . . . to f) . . .

Article 13

Amendment of the By-Laws

111.18

I. . . .

II. Amendments to the By-Laws require the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany. They become effective on registration in the Court's Register of Associations.

Article 14

Dissolution

111.19

- I. The dissolution of the Spiritual Assembly can result
 - a) from an absolute majority decision taken by the members of the Assembly in a meeting of the members called exclusively for this purpose,
 - b) from an absolute majority decision of the National Spiritual Assembly.
- II. In case of the dissolution of the Spiritual Assembly its assets are transferred to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Germany, which must use them directly and exclusively for charitable and religious purposes and purposes of public benefit.

111.20

2. The District Court indicated questionable legal points of a formal and material kind in the registration procedure and demanded rectification. The appellant under 1) was stated to lack particularly the necessary legal independence, because its existence is dependent on the one hand on the local community, and on the other on the National Spiritual Assembly. The appellants counter-claimed that the institutional structure of the worldwide Bahá'í Community rests on a divine foundation and cannot be changed by them. As, according to the Constitutional Law of the Bahá'ís, all power of jurisdiction lies with the elected bodies, these should be given legal capacity in order to be able to participate in legal proceedings. The District Court rejected the application for registration with decision of 8 December 1983, and another application of 22.12.1983 with decision of 2 January 1984.

111.21

3. The immediate appeal of the appellants under 2) to 4) against the decisions of the District Court of 8 December 1983 and 2 January 1984 was rejected as unjustified by the State Court on 8 May 1985. The Association's By-Laws presented were stated to violate § 37 par. 1 BGB, as well as the principle of corporate autonomy. Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws, which gives the provisions for calling a meeting of the members, was stated not to do justice to the protection of the minority called for in § 37 par. 1 BGB. The legal provision demands that the number of members at whose request a meeting of the members is to be called be fixed proportionately, so that allowance will be made for future changes in the strength of the Association. The membership of the Association could drop to five without resulting in legal incapacity to make decisions. In this case the number of three members fixed in Art. 9 par. 2 no longer represents a minority. Above all it was pointed out that the By-Laws contain regulations leading to a legal and organizational dependence of the Association on a third party and are thus incompatible with the principle of independence and self-administration of associations. On the one hand through Art. 4 par. 2, 11 par. 1, 13 par. 2, 14 par. 1 letter b, and through further regulations, the National Spiritual Assembly as a nonmember of the Association is to be given the right of decision-making in the removal of members, amendment of the By-Laws, dissolution of the Association and other matters concern-

ing the Association; on the other hand the Bahá'í Community is to decide through elections on the establishment and the duration of the membership, according to Art. 3 par. 2 and 4 par. 1. Such wide-ranging influence by a third party in the organization of an association is inadmissible.

4. The High State Court Stuttgart rejected as unjustified the further appeal of the appellants under (2) to (4) with decision of 27 January 1986 (OLGZ 1986, p. 257). It noted that Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws violates § 37 par. 2 BGB, because it does not ensure, with a possible change in the number of members, that the call for a meeting of the members has to follow the request of a minority. The By-Laws are furthermore not reconcilable with the principle of independence and self-administration of the Association (corporate autonomy). Art. 14 par. 2 letter b, according to which the National Spiritual Assembly can dissolve the Association, violates § 41 BGB. It is inadmissible to give the right to an external third party to dissolve the Association against the wish of its members. Insofar as jurisprudence had judged such regulations in individual cases to be admissible (KG, DJ 1936, p. 1948; OLG Karlsruhe, JW 1936, p. 3266; OLG Stuttgart, Das Recht [The Law] 1936, col. 151), these decisions had been made in the time of National Socialism and their reasoning was not convincing. The election of the members by the Bahá'í Community, as envisaged in Art. 3 par. 2 and Art. 4 par. 1 of the By-Laws, violates §§ 38 and 58 No. 1 BGB. The form by which a new member joins and the declaration of acceptance could indeed be regulated in the By-Laws in any way that is desired, and membership can be tied to certain preconditions. But in principle the Association is to be free to decide whether to accept someone as a member, as long as it is not, as a vitally important Association with monopoly status, exceptionally obliged to accept members. Apart from these individual regulations, the overall picture of the By-Laws shows such a strong third-party influence that there can no longer be a question of autonomous action on the part of the Association. Significant hereby are the National Spiritual Assembly's rights of intervention, according to Art. 4 par. 2 (removal of a member), Art. 11 par. 1 letter c (right of decision-making on the area of jurisdiction), Art. 13 par. 2 (reserving approval for amendment of the By-Laws), Art. 14 par. 2 (transfer of the assets

to the National Spiritual Assembly in case of the dissolution of the Association). The By-Laws contain a renunciation of the autonomy of the Association not in accordance with corporate law.

III.

111.23 The Constitutional Appeals are addressed against the decisions of the High State Court and of the State Court as well as—in the relevant interpretation of the brief of the Constitutional Appeal—against both decisions of the District Court. The appellants presented an expert opinion by Prof. Dr. Friedrich Müller on this and claim essentially:

111.24 1. The Constitutional Appeals are admissible. The required interest for legal protection is established. This is not contravened by the fact that the rejection of the application to register was based also on an objection to Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws, which the appellants had agreed to change. Should an application again be made after amendment of this provision of the By-Laws, it would again be rejected because of the other provisions of the By-Laws which were questioned by the High State Court, in which case there would probably be no reexamination of the case.

111.25 2. The High State Court has interpreted the corporate law of the Code of Civil Law incorrectly, and has especially misunderstood the content and significance of Art. 4 par. 1 and 2, Art. 144 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 3, 4 WRV.

a) Contrary to the interpretation of the High State Court § 41 par. 1 BGB does not prevent the transfer to a third party of the right to dissolve the Association. This is certainly true when the assembly of the members has this right as well. The provisions of the By-Laws for the election of the members of the Association by the Bahá'í Community and the termination of their membership due to new elections are in accordance with §§ 38 and 58 BGB. As is shown from §§ 25 and 40 BGB, State Law leaves it to the Association to make such provisions. No objections can be derived from the Code of Civil Law either against the competence of the National Spiritual Assembly to remove a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly (Art. 4 par. 2 of the By-Laws), or to the definition of its area of jurisdiction (Art. 11 par. 1 letter c), or to the duty of approval for amendment of the By-Laws provided

for in Art. 13 par. 2, or to the transfer of assets of the Spiritual Assembly in case of its dissolution to the National Spiritual Assembly (Art. 14 par. 2). Altogether the provisions of the By-Laws contested by the High State Court did not grant an inadmissible outside influence of a third party on the appellant under 1). Its integration in the hierarchical structure of the Religious Community of the Bahá'ís is of necessity given by its rules and principles, which are based on divine Revelation.

- b) The denial of legal capacity violates the constitutional rights of the appellant under 1) as derived from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG and violates Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 3 and 4 WRV. These provisions of the Constitution comprehend an organizational structure for a religious community, including the right to seek legal capacity for an administrative institution of the community. In the understanding of the Bahá'ís, which is relevant here, it is an unyieldable principle that the administrative institutions of the local communities, but not the communities themselves, should attain legal capacity. The Constitution in Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 2 to 5 WRV gives religious communities the basic right of choice as regards their legal form. Since the Bahá'ís were denied the status of 'Körperschaft des Öffentlichen Rechts' [Corporate Body under Public Law] which they sought, the appellant under 1) must be granted legal capacity under Civil Law. Even if the High State Court's interpretation of corporate law for nonreligious associations should be correct, its effect on the appellant under 1) is more serious because of his religious aims and the necessity of integration in the national and international order of the Bahá'ís which they require, and thus it cannot be applied to him.

The appellants under 2) to 4) as officers of appellant under 1) suffer violation of their right, protected by Art. 4 par. 2 GG, to carry out administrative activities for the religious community. 111.26

IV.

On the Constitutional Appeal the Federal Minister of Justice and the Ministry for Justice, Federal and European Affairs of Baden-Württemberg have given their opinion. Both consider the Constitutional Appeal unjustified. 111.27

- 111.28 1. The Federal Minister of Justice explains that the right to be granted legal capacity for the appellant under 1) cannot directly be derived from Art. 4 par. 2 and Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 3 WRV by referring to the contents of belief of the Bahá'í Religion. Art. 4 par. 2 GG obliges the State to respect belief and to protect the practice of religion, but not to create legal regulations which correspond to the particular contents of belief of individual religious communities. It is questionable whether Art. 137 par. 3 WRV covers the attainment of legal capacity by the appellant under 1); Art. 137 par. 4 WRV, which is not directly applicable to the appellant under 1) as a mere sub-organization of a religious community, gives an explicit regulation just for this area. In any case, the Spiritual Assembly can attain legal capacity only according to the general prescriptions of Civil Law; lesser requirements than those demanded in Art. 137 par. 4 WRV for the registration of a religious community as an association, could not apply in this case. The Courts, in their decision on the registration of the appellant under 1), have not misunderstood the meaning and significance of Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 3 and 4 WRV.
- 111.29 2. According to the view of the Minister of Justice, Federal and European Affairs of Baden-Württemberg, the By-Laws violate not only individual regulations of the compulsory law. They also depart significantly in their totality from the type of autonomous association regulated in the Code of Civil Law, and so expose the appellant under 1) to dominating third-party influences, that the decision of the High State Court cannot be contested in the light of the regulations of corporate law of the Code of Civil Law. Even when taking the relevant Constitutional Law into necessary consideration, no other result can obtain. The appellants have not so far proven conclusively that the belief of the Bahá'ís demands in particular the organizational rules considered irreconcilable with the regulations of the Code of Civil Law. It is suggested rather that the teachings of the Faith grant a certain flexibility in the arrangement of details of the organizational structure.

B.

- 111.30 The Constitutional Appeals are admissible.

1. The appellant under 1) is entitled to make the Constitutional Appeal. 111.31
As a union of persons he can, independent of given legal capacity, claim the possible violation of a constitutional right (cf. BVerfGE 3, 383 <391>). The Constitutional Appeal specifically concerns the question whether the appellant under 1) can be denied registration as an association and thus the attainment of legal capacity, without violation of his constitutional right from Art. 4 par. 2 and 2 GG.

The appellant under 1) asserts that his freedom of religious practice is violated by the fact that with the denial of his registration in the Court's Register of Associations it has been made impossible for him to organize in accordance with the internal constitution prescribed essentially and imperatively by the belief of the Bahá'ís. Thus the protection of the Constitutional Law of religious freedom is infringed. The claim of the appellant under 1) is adequately substantiated; according to his presentation the material and vital areas of religious freedom are concerned and there appears a possible violation of the guarantee of the Constitutional Law. 111.32

2. The appellants under 2) to 4) claim that the denial of registration to the appellant under 1) makes it impossible for them to organize themselves in the framework of their religious community according to the binding prescriptions of the Revelation underlying it, and thus to practice their religion. With this presentation they have sufficiently proven the possibility of a violation of their constitutional right from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG, which is also an individual constitutional right. That the appellants under 3) and 4) no longer belong to the Local Spiritual Assembly, has not lessened their original interest in a decision of the case. How a change in the situation affects a Constitutional Appeal already made, is to be decided in each individual case, taking into consideration the contested act of sovereignty underlying the appeal, the significance of the constitutional guarantee appealed to and the purposes of the Constitutional Appeal (BVerfGE 76, 1 <38>). In the present case the basic significance of the Constitutional Question brought up is to be considered, and further, that the appellants under 3) and 4) can again become members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in elections, and further court proceedings in case of renewed applications for registration in the Court's Register of Associations are possible (cf. also BVerfGE 21, 139 <143>). 111.33

- 111.34 3. The legitimate interest to take legal action as basis for the Constitutional Appeal is not vitiated through the High State Court's having based its decision also on the consideration not contested by the appellants, namely that Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws does not guarantee, as regards calling a meeting of the members, the protection of minorities required in § 37 par. 1 BGB. Thus, this is obviously a question which plays only a subordinate rôle in the court proceedings. The appellants are ready to amend the By-Laws on this point. They cannot be expected to again go through a hopeless application after such an amendment.

C.

- 111.35 The Constitutional Appeals are justified. The decisions of the Courts do not do justice to the significance of the constitutional right of freedom of religious association, guaranteed in Art. 4 par. 2 and 2 GG in connection with Art. 140 GG/137 par. 2 and 4 WRV, for the interpretation (and application) of the corporate law of the Code of Civil Law, and they thereby violate the constitutional rights of the appellants.

I.

- 111.36 The Local Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tübingen and the believers of the Bahá'í Community are entitled to the constitutional right from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG. A community's mere assertion and self-understanding of professing a religion and of being a religious community cannot justify reference for it and its members to the guarantee of religious freedom of Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG; rather it must be a religion and a religious community in fact, according to spiritual content and outward appearance. To examine and determine this in case of dispute is the duty of the organs of the State, of the courts in the final analysis,—in application of the ruling of the State's legal system. These cannot decide freely in such a case, but must base their decision on the concept of religion to which the meaning and purpose of the fundamental guarantee refers, as intended or set forth in the Constitution. In the present case it is not necessary to go more deeply into this, as the character of the Bahá'í Faith as a religion and of the Bahá'í Community as a religious community is evident, in actual everyday life, in cultural tradition, and in the understanding of the general public as well as of the science of comparative religion.

II.

Religious freedom in the meaning of Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG also includes freedom of religious association as it follows from this regulation in connection with the relevant Weimar Church Articles which are included by Art. 140 GG. 111.37

1. Freedom of religious association is not expressly mentioned in Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG; specifically guaranteed are freedom of religion, conscience, religious and ideological belief, as well as the freedom of religious practice. According to the judgments of the Federal Constitutional Court the freedom of religion guaranteed in Art. 4 GG has to be understood in a comprehensive manner (cf. BVerfGE 24, 236 <244 ff.>). The intention of the framer of the Constitution, after the experience of religious persecution by the National Socialist regime, was aimed at guaranteeing freedom of religion not just as particular partial freedoms, but fully. In any case none of the rights to religious freedom, which had been recognized in the Weimar Constitution as the result of hundreds of years of historical development, should now be excluded. A part of these rights to religious freedom was freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom of belief, freedom of private and public religious practice (freedom of worship) and freedom of religious association (cf. Art. 135, 137 par. 2 WRV and G. Anschütz, *Die Religionsfreiheit* [The Freedom of Religion], in: Anschütz/Thoma (Publ.) HDStR, vol. 2, 1932, § 106, p. 681 ff.). 111.38

This is confirmed by the history of its development. In the consultations of the Parliamentary Council, what was later to be Art. 4 expressly contained the guarantee of the freedom of religious association (“The right of association for religious and ideological societies is recognized”), from its presentation by the Committee of Principles and the first reading in the Main Committee as sentence 2 of par. 1. Only in the fourth reading in the Main Committee on 4 May 1949—after inclusion of the Weimar Church Compromise into the Constitution—this sentence was deleted with the reasoning that it is now unnecessary, because Art. 137 par. 2 WRV is now part of the Constitution (v.Doemming/ Füsslein/Matz, *Entstehungsgeschichte der Artikel des Grundgesetzes* [History of the Development of the Articles of the Constitution]: JöR, N.F., vol. 1, p. 73 foll.; Parl.Council, HA-Prot., 57th meeting on 4.5.1949, p. 745). From this it follows, according to the intention of the Parliamentary Council, 111.39

that freedom of religious association is, and is to continue to be, guaranteed in Constitutional Law. It would be totally opposed to this ruling and to the intention of the framer of the Constitution, if it [freedom of religious association] were to be denied merely because of its deletion from Art. 4 which was only made in order to avoid a double guarantee, since it is part of the freedom of religion guaranteed in Constitutional Law. It is rather to be deduced that Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG refers for its guarantee of the freedom of religious association to Art. 140 GG/137 par. 2 WRV and includes its normative content.

- 111.40 2. The guarantee of freedom of religious association includes the freedom to form and organize as a religious association based on a common Faith. Even the concept of religious *association* points to the fact that a union on the basis of State Law is intended, and not just a mere spiritual community of worship. The possibility of forming a religious association is to open the way to organizing as a union of people for the realization of a common religious purpose, to give some legal form, and to participate in general legal proceedings. This is not meant as a right to a *particular* legal form, such as that of an incorporated association or some other form of legal person; guaranteed is, however, the possibility of a legal existence in some form or other, including participation in general legal proceedings.

- 111.41 It is in conformity with this that Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 4 WRV opens and guarantees to religious communities the possibility of acquiring legal capacity according to the general conditions of Civil Law. These conditions have to be observed by everyone on principle, including religious communities. Nothing is therefore lost, if a religious community or one of its parts cannot acquire a particular legal form it is aspiring to, because of a special organization rooted in its belief. Freedom of religious association demands, however, that the self-understanding of the religious community, insofar as it is rooted in the freedom of religious belief and confession guaranteed in Art. 4 par. 1 GG and is realized in the practice of the religion protected by Art. 4 par. 2 GG, is to be especially considered in the interpretation and application of the relevant law, here of corporate law of the Code of Civil Law (cf. BverfGE 53, 366 <401> m.w.N.). This means not only that the religious community is allowed to make full use of the leeway in organization opened to it by Dispositive Law [i.e. Law that is amenable to negotiation]. Even in the application of compulsory regulations leeways of interpretation

are to be used in favor of the religious community if necessary; this must not, however, lead to neglect of imperative consideration of the security of legal proceedings or of the rights of others.

It would be incompatible with the freedom of religious association, if a religious community, in view of its internal organization, were to be denied participation in general legal proceedings entirely, or this were made possible only under unacceptable conditions. ^{111.42}

III.

The contested decisions do not satisfy the normative content of the freedom of religious association described. The corporate law of the Code of Civil Law admits of taking into account special requirements of internal organization resulting from the individuality of religious associations which are a part of a religious community or in some special relationship to it. Since the legal form of a ‘Körperschaft des Öffentlichen Rechts’ [Corporate Body under Public Law] is not available to the Bahá’ís (1 following), this is applicable to the Local Spiritual Assembly, from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG (2 following). ^{111.43}

1. The Bahá’í Community cannot acquire the character of a Corporate Body under Public Law according to Art. 140 GG/Art. 137 par. 5 WRV. With this form of organization the existing problems would be solved, because in the framework of a “Corporate Body under Public Law” which in connection with the regulations of Art. 137 par. 5 WRV functions only as a blanket concept, the inclusion into a hierarchical structure, as it appears to be given for the Bahá’ís in their belief, could be fully realized organizationally. This is shown, for example, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, for which a hierarchical organizational structure is determined which acquires validity in State Law without diminution. Thus, church parishes are established or dissolved by the local bishop alone, after a hearing in the Diocesan Council of Priests, without the advice or the agreement of the priest or the congregation of the church or of a body selected by the congregation being necessary (Can. 515, § 2 i.V.m. Can. 127, §§ 1 and 2 CIC). The appellants have, however, shown that recognition as a Corporate Body under Public Law is out of the question for the Bahá’í Community, according to the relevant recommendations of the Conference of the Ministers of Religion and as the result of an enquiry to the Ministry of Religion of Hesse; it had only about ^{111.44}

4,000 to 5,000 members in the Federal Republic in the year 1986, who moreover were divided among approximately 50 local Bahá'í communities. It cannot be said that the denial of recognition as a Corporate Body under Public Law is legally incorrect or even wrong in view of these circumstances and of the criteria of Art. 137 par. 5 WRV. Therefore it is uncertain whether the Bahá'í Community, were the acquisition of the character of a Corporate Body under Public Law possible for it, could be referred to it without losing its right to freedom granted in Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG, or would have a choice of legal form.

111.45

2. It is possible in the framework of the corporate law of the Code of Civil Law, and it is demanded by Constitutional Law, that the religious requirements for the internal organization of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís as a religious association and as part of a religious community be especially considered.
 - a) The regulations of the By-Laws presented, which were considered by the Courts to be incompatible with the principle of independence and self-administration (autonomy of the Association), on the establishment of membership (Art. 4 par. 2), removal from membership (Art. 4 par. 2) and the dissolution of the Association (Art. 14 par. 1 letter b), the requirements for amendment of the By-Laws (Art. 13 par. 2) and the definition of the tasks of the Association (Art. 11 par. 1 letter c), do not concern those regulations of corporate law which, in the interest of the security and clarity of legal proceedings, regulate the affairs and legal relations with external effects (appointment or removal of the officers, their power of representation, liability of the assets of the Association, liquidation in case of dissolution of the Association etc). They refer solely to the internal organization of the Association.
 - b) The regulations contested are not in contradiction to the wording of the regulations of corporate law on the internal organization of the Association. The dissolution of the Association regulated in § 41 BGB by decision of the general meeting of members is not excluded but supplemented by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís' right of dissolution; on neither the manner of the establishment of membership, nor on the possibilities for removal, does § 58 BGB contain any regulation; the regulation

of § 33 BGB on amendment of the By-Laws is dispositive [not obligatory] (§ 40 BGB); on the definition of the tasks of the Association there is no legal regulation.

- c) The courts justify the inadmissibility of the mentioned By-Laws merely on the basis of their incompatibility with the principle of corporate autonomy characterizing corporate law. This principle of corporate autonomy is not expressly laid down in the corporate laws of the BGB; rather it is deduced from jurisprudence and from the doctrine of the totality of regulations, which trace back the bringing into being and organization of an association, as well as the conduct of its affairs, to the will of the members of the association. Its aim, similar to that of private autonomy, is to preserve the character of the association as a union of persons carried on mainly by the will and action of its members (KG, OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <387>; RGRK-Steffen, 12th ed., marginal No. 31 f. before § 21, § 25 marginal No. 1; Staudinger-Coing, 12th ed., introd. remark to §§ 21–54, marginal No. 38; AK-Ott, § 25 marginal No. 15 f.; cf. also Flume, *Allgemeiner Teil des Bürgerlichen Rechts* [General Part of Civil Law] I/2, 1983, p. 189 f.). Part of this autonomy is to give institutions which are provided with it the right to give themselves the organization suitable to their aims, and to freely determine it, as long as there are no binding provisions or principles derived from the character of the particular institution which are contrary to it. It is emphasized in jurisdiction that this autonomy can also be practiced in such a way, that the right of self-administration of the association is limited by its Constitution; such a limitation also represents a practice of autonomy; it is therefore a curtailment of autonomy when such regulations are declared inadmissible (cf. KG, OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <387>; Dütz, 2. FS for Herschel, 1982, p. 55 <73 ff.>; a.A. Flume, a.a.O., p. 194 ff.).

The principle of corporate autonomy, as it is understood in legal judgments and literature, is thus marked by two tendencies in regard to its content, which do not necessarily run parallel: on the one hand it protects autonomy in the formation of the organizational structure of the association according to the free self-determination of the members, to which can also belong integration in a hierarchically organized community; on the other hand it protects the self-determination of the association and

its members from a renunciation which almost totally defeats their own self-determination. It does not exclude the possibility, rather it opens up the way, to an equalization in the interpretation and application of both tendencies, by taking into consideration the concrete case, i.e. in relation to the aims and individuality of the Association in question. Thus it is considered consistent with corporate autonomy, to create associations at different levels, inside which the lower-level associations—be they of legal capacity or not—are in a relation of dependency to the superior associations, but do not thereby lose their character as associations, as long as they also pursue tasks independently (Reichert/ Dannecker/Kühr, *Handbuch des Vereins- und Verbandsrechts* [Handbook of the Law governing Associations and Unions], 4th ed. 1987, marginal No. 2098 ff.; Soergel-Hadding, marginal No. 53 before § 21; BGHZ 90, p. 331).

d) If, in this connection, one considers the individuality of religious associations which are organized as parts of a religious community, it is obvious, in view of the frequently observable hierarchical internal organization rooted in the belief of religious communities, that associations which are part of religious communities, or in a particular relationship to them, wish to be integrated into the hierarchy of their religious community. This cannot automatically be considered as submission to outside third-party influence which threatens the essential independence and self-administration of the association.

aa) Autonomy in the formation and organization of a religious association can be practiced in such a way, that one of the aims of the association is to be part of a religious community and to integrate into the structure determined by its religious laws. Such self-determined aims of integration which, in the case of a religious association, may well represent an expression of the religious self-determination of the members in their common Faith, must not be judged simply as surrender of the self-determination of the association. A limit is reached only when the self-determination and self-administration of the association is ruled out, not only in certain respects as a consequence of the hierarchical integration arising from the religious law, but greatly beyond that; the association would then no longer

be carried on mainly by the will of its members, but would become a mere administrative center or would be run for the separate estate of another party (cf. KG, OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <390>; BayObLGZ 1979, p. 303 <308 ff.>).

According to the above, corporate law permits, in the case of a religious association constituted as part of a religious community, that limitations in the autonomous rights of dissolution, removal or activity shall not be considered as inadmissible external third-party influence incompatible with corporate autonomy, as long as they serve, and are limited to, safeguarding integration into the greater religious community in the framework of existing ties of religious law—such as the preservation and identity of belief and basic duties of daily living. With such a limitation to the powers of intervention of a hierarchically superior institution, which only claims for itself some kind of authority over the teachings and corresponding rights of jurisdiction, a sufficient share of self-determination and self-administration of the association is preserved.

bb) By considering the influence of the National Spiritual Assembly specified in the By-Laws in regard to the continuance, membership and activities of the Local Spiritual Assembly as constituting in general an inadmissible third-party influence over the Association, the courts have misunderstood the character of religious associations which, as part of their belief, organize themselves hierarchically as part of a religious community, and thus have misconstrued the significance of the Constitutional Law of freedom of religious association for the interpretation and application of the principle of corporate autonomy. They have considered the National Spiritual Assembly to be an extraneous organization, characterized by different aims and interests, exercising a dominating influence, without considering the unity and mutuality linked to religious law. It is no different with the conclusion concerning the election of the members of the Local

Spiritual Assembly by the believers of the local Bahá'í community. These, by virtue of the ties of religious law, are not third parties subjecting the Association to an alien influence from outside and thereby annulling its self-determination; rather, this manner of establishing membership is in accordance with the purpose of the Association to administer the affairs of the local Bahá'í Community as a hierarchical governing body (Art. 2 par. 2 of the By-Laws and Preamble), and it precisely serves its realization.

- e) Nor can an inadmissible third-party influence be deduced from the fact that, in case of dissolution of the Association by the National Spiritual Assembly, the assets will fall to it (Art. 14 par. 1 and 2 of the By-Laws). The purpose of this provision of the By-Laws is not that of enabling the National Spiritual Assembly, by making use of its right of dissolution, to seize another's assets for the purpose of increasing its own assets. This is contradicted by the fact that according to the By-Laws no contributions are levied with the purpose of accumulating assets; the financing of the Association is solely through voluntary donations; moreover, the Association has expressly subordinated itself to the legal conditions of charitable purpose (Art. 2 par. 2 and 3 of the By-Laws).

IV.

111.47 The cited decisions therefore violate the appellants' constitutional right from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG in connection with Art. 140 GG/137 par. 2 and 4 WRV, in that they do not sufficiently consider, in the interpretation and application of the meaning of corporate autonomy, the character of the Local Spiritual Assembly as a religious Association and as part of a religious community. They are therefore to be revoked. The case is to be referred back to the District Court for renewed consideration. It will have to examine, among other things, whether the right of dissolution and removal accorded the National Spiritual Assembly, expressed without limits in the By-Laws, is sufficiently limited by the purpose of the Association and the Preamble to the Constitution, in the sense of the explanations under III 2 d) aa), or if an express definition in the By-Laws is needed.

The decision on the costs follows from § 34a par. 2 BVerGG.
 Mahrenholz Böckenförde Klein
 Grasshof Kruis Franssen
 Kirchhof Winter

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Decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court

Elucidation of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Elucidation in German	Elucidation in English
a.A.	andere Ansicht	Other opinion or view
a.a.O.	am angegeben Ort (bereits vorher zitierte Quelle)	idem. (from the source already cited)
AK-Ott	Kommentar zum Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch (Reihe Alternativkommentare), 1. Auflage 1979ff. Ott = Bearbeiter	Commentary in the Code of Civil Law (series of alternative commentaries), 1st edition 1979ff. Ott = name of author
BayObLGZ	Bayerisches Oberstes Landesgericht, Entscheidungssammlung in Zivilsachen	Bavarian Supreme State Court, Collection of decisions in civil matters
BGB	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch	Book of the code of civil law
BGHZ	Bundesgerichtshof, Entscheidungen in Zivilsachen	Federal Court, decisions in civil matters
BverfGE	Bundesverfassungsgericht, Entscheidungen	Federal Constitutional Court, Decisions
BverfGG	Gesetz über das Bundesverfassungsgericht in der Fassung vom 3.2.1971	Law on the Federal Constitutional Court in the draft of 3 February 1971
BvR	Registerzeichen des Bundesverfassungsgerichts für Verfassungsbeschwerden	Registration symbol of the Federal Constitutional Court for constitutional appeals
Can.	Canon	Canon (i.e. in relation to the canon Law of the Church)
CIC	Codex Iuris Canonici	Codex of Canon Law
FGG	Reichsgesetz über die freiwillige Gerichtbarkeit vom 17.5.1898	Imperial Law on voluntary jurisdiction of 17 May 1898
FS für Herschel	Festschrift für Herschel	Publication in honour of Herschel

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GG	Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland vom 23.5.1949	Basic Law (Constitution) of the Federal Republic of Germany of 23 May 1949
GReg	Gerichtsregister	Court Register
HA-Prot	Protokolle des Hauptausschusses des Parlamentarischen Rates	Minutes of the Main Committee of the Parliamentary Council
HDSStR	Handbuch des deutschen Staatskirchenrechts	Handbook of German State Church Law
i.V.m.	In Verbindung mit	In connection with
m.w.N.	Mit weiteren Nachweisen	With further indications
OLGZ	Entscheidungen der Oberlandesgerichte in Zivilsachen	Decisions of the High State Courts in civil matters
RGRK-Steffen	Das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rechtsprechung, des Reichsgerichts und des Bundesgerichtshofes, Kommentar, 12. Auflage 1974ff. Steffen = Bearbeiter	The Code of Civil Law with special reference to legal pronouncements, to the Imperial Court and to the Federal Court, Commentary, 12th edition 1974ff. Steffen = name of author
WRV	Weimarer Verfassung vom 11.8.1919	Weimar Constitution of 11 August 1919

Decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court

Background and significance

111.50 In a decision handed down on 5 February 1991 the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany upheld a constitutional appeal made by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tübingen. This decision is of such far-reaching importance that the Universal House of Justice has asked that the following summary of its background and effects be sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies. This summary is freely based on an article prepared by Dr. Udo Schaefer at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany for publication in *Bahá'í Nachrichten*, the newsletter of the German Bahá'í community.

I.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order has so many unique features, and is so different from the organizational structure of most other religions, that not infrequently difficulties are experienced in conveying to the authorities in some countries a clear understanding of the nature of our institutions, and thus of obtaining a status that is accorded to other similar bodies under civil law. 111.51

In Germany, for example, 95 percent of all associations are recognized as being “of public benefit.” This is similar to what is known as “charitable status” in other countries, and is the basis for the granting of various tax exemptions. Over the years the Spiritual Assemblies in Germany repeatedly experienced difficulty with the Inland Revenue offices until the National Spiritual Assembly turned to the Federal Minister of Finance, who issued a decree on 6 August 1990 clarifying that the Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís “serve the promotion of religious purposes” and thus have public-benefit status. Even after this, one of the Revenue Offices continued to insist that the By-Laws of a Spiritual Assembly needed to be amended. 111.52

A second problem was that of the form under which Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies could be incorporated. This was the problem that eventually came before the Federal Constitutional Court, namely, whether the Local Spiritual Assemblies could be incorporated under German Law using the By-Laws that are the universal Bahá'í standard. When different legal systems collide there are always problems, and this was the case here, where Bahá'í constitutional law seemed to be incompatible with German civil law. In order to make these problems intelligible and to explain the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court, it is necessary to consider the historical background. 111.53

II.

Firstly, it is necessary to understand that the Bahá'í Community is not only a religious community but also a community of law. The believers are linked together not only by the tie of belief and love, but also by the legal norms with which the Founder of our Faith has endowed His community, legal norms which govern the structure of the community, its administrative organs and its functions. The main sources of these legal norms, which are to be found throughout the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Kitáb-i-'Ahd and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, 111.54

as well as the works of Shoghi Effendi who, as the Authorized Interpreter, expounded and elaborated these norms in his letters (especially in those published in *Bahá'í Administration* and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*).

111.55 The revelation of the laws of the Faith, and their application in practice, has been a very gradual process. Bahá'u'lláh had appointed four Hands of the Cause of God during His own lifetime, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had brought into being embryonic Local Spiritual Assemblies, but the raising up of the institutions of the Administrative Order really started with the ministry of Shoghi Effendi.

111.56 In the establishment of the Administrative Order the American Bahá'í Community played a leading role. In the twenties, under the unerring guidance of the Guardian, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada formulated a constitution for itself, consisting of a Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, and one for Local Spiritual Assemblies, comprising a set of By-Laws, all based on the laws and principles of the Faith, and in a form through which these institutions could incorporate (obtain legal capacity) under American law. In doing this the difficulty was to mould the noncodified Bahá'í laws and principles into forms made available by civil law for the attainment of legal capacity. With the expert help of American jurists, constitutions were worked out for the National Assembly and the Local Assemblies which were endorsed by Shoghi Effendi and prescribed by him as the pattern for the establishment of the Bahá'í Administration in other parts of the world.

III.

111.57 When, after the Second World War, the Spiritual Assemblies that had been dissolved under the Nazi regime were reestablished in Germany, the National Spiritual Assembly adopted the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws which formed the national Bahá'í constitution, and the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly which were the standard local Bahá'í constitution, simply translating them from English into German. Wherever the Local Assemblies attained legal capacity, they were incorporated with these By-Laws.

111.58 As the establishment of the judicial system of the German Federal Republic progressed, the scrutiny of articles of incorporation became increasingly strict, and Local Spiritual Assemblies which wished to incorporate met with more and more difficulties. The standard By-Laws corresponded to American legal concepts and were expressed in American legal language.

These were radically at variance with the concepts of German law and thus, in many instances barely comprehensible to German lawyers.

Under the pressure of this experience the German Bahá'í institutions acquired the understanding that, while the fundamental structures and principles of our law as “Divine Law” are unalterable, they have to be expressed in different terminology according to the legal systems of particular countries. This experience was shared by other Bahá'í communities around the world. 111.59

Thus, in the seventies, with the agreement of the Universal House of Justice, new By-Laws, which are faithful to the Bahá'í standard constitution and are also in accordance with German Law, were drafted and introduced as a pattern for all Local Spiritual Assemblies in Germany. All Spiritual Assemblies in the Federal Republic are today incorporated according to these sample By-Laws. The National Spiritual Assembly also prepared a new constitution for itself, but this has not yet been registered, because the Court of Registration concerned was awaiting the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court. 111.60

Although this development placed the German Spiritual Assemblies in an incomparably better position in relation to the Courts of Registration, it soon became clear that the legal construction of the By-Laws was still not easily conveyed to the courts concerned. It is not the community (with the Assembly as its managing body) which is the association, but the Assembly itself, which is elected by the members of the community; this is an unusual construction in Germany. Normally, membership in an association is attained by joining it, but membership in a Spiritual Assembly is through election by a “third party,” the community. Normally in Germany, an Association has a minimum size (7 members) and has no upper limit. As against that the membership of the Assembly is limited in number: it has nine members, no fewer and no more. In spite of these difficulties it was usually possible to overcome the Registrar's objections and obtain legal incorporation. Sometimes this required proceedings in the law courts. 111.61

IV.

The legal administrator of the District Court of Tübingen was especially obstinate. He objected to no less than eight points in the By-Laws and finally, on 8 December 1983, refused incorporation. The legal measures taken against this decision were unsuccessful. The State Court of Tübingen 111.62

rejected the further appeal of 5 May 1985. The High State Court in Stuttgart, to which the case was subsequently appealed, rejected it on 27 January 1986.

^{111.63} With that the legal measures were exhausted, and this would have meant that the Spiritual Assembly of Tübingen would never be able to incorporate with the By-Laws of the standard local Bahá'í constitution. Beyond this, when the decision of the High State Court in Stuttgart was published in the legal literature, a number of other courts, alerted by this decision, demanded that incorporated Local Assemblies amend their By-Laws or else face cancellation of their existing incorporation.

^{111.64} The decision of the High State Court in Stuttgart was founded on the principle of corporate autonomy which applies to associations under German civil incorporation law. According to this, an association is an autonomous body free from third-party influence and is subject only to the law of the land. The fact that Local Spiritual Assemblies are linked in a hierarchy and that their superior institutions, the National Assembly and the Universal House of Justice, have a series of rights of intervention according to the By-Laws, is seen to violate this principle of corporate autonomy.

^{111.65} Thus a critical situation had arisen for the German Bahá'í Community. There was a great danger that all incorporated Spiritual Assemblies, including the National Spiritual Assembly, would be deprived of their legal capacity.

^{111.66} The German Constitution provides a possibility for recognized religious communities to incorporate, in certain circumstances, under "public law" rather than as associations under civil law. But this presupposes a minimum number of members which the German Bahá'í community is still far from having reached.

^{111.67} The Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís must therefore have recourse to the corporate law of the German Code of Civil Law to achieve legal capacity. But, to obtain such registration the Spiritual Assemblies would have had to change the basic structures of their By-Laws. Such changes the Bahá'ís cannot and will not accept, because the essential structures of the constitutional law of our community are the Law of God and are therefore not open to compromise. These essential structures include the vertical form of institutional organization.

^{111.68} With all other legal means exhausted, the Federal Constitutional Court presented the last resort for the German Bahá'í community, but this presupposed that the decisions previously passed by the courts had violated the constitutional rights of the Spiritual Assembly of Tübingen. The National

Spiritual Assembly was convinced that this was unmistakably the case. Article 4 of the German Constitution guarantees not just freedom of religious practice, which includes freedom of belief and worship, but also freedom of organization. The decisions passed by the courts, and the interpretation of civil law underlying them, had led to the result that hierarchical integration within the framework of the Bahá'í Administration was made impossible for the Bahá'ís. Were these decisions to be enforced, each local Bahá'í community would be isolated from the rest of the Administrative Order. The community as a whole would no longer exist, it would be only an amorphous collection of autonomous bodies with no links to one another. The Bahá'í Community as the “People of God” embodied in a legal structure, would no longer exist. In this the National Assembly saw a violation of Article 4 of the Federal Constitution and concluded that the submission of a Constitutional Appeal was advisable.

Although, from the outset, this constitutional question had been referred to in writing, the courts concerned with the successive appeals on the case had not considered them at all. 111.69

After receiving the Constitutional Appeal, which was submitted in March 1986, the Federal Constitutional Court considered this extremely unusual matter very intensively. It even requested original literature from the German Bahá'í Publishing Trust, asked for and examined numerous By-Laws of other associations, Christian and Islamic, and solicited views from the Federal Minister of Justice and from the Ministry of Justice of Baden-Württemberg, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Institute for State Church Law of the Dioceses of Germany (on the question of corporate autonomy in the case of church associations). The two Ministries of Justice expressed an opinion very unfavorable to the Bahá'ís, concluding that the contested decisions had been passed correctly and so the Constitutional Appeal was unfounded. 111.70

The Federal Constitutional Court took a long time to reach its decision. It had to consider the far-reaching consequences which a decision in our favor could have. Would it not open wide the floodgates for organizations unjustifiably calling themselves “religions” to make use of this decision in future? 111.71

V.

The decision which the Federal Constitution Court reached, wholly in our favor, on 5 February 1991, is a relatively rare decision in the field of State 111.72

Church Law in Germany, and for this alone it constitutes a highly significant precedent in the formulation and development of German Law.

111.73 For the German Bahá'í Community this decision, as shown by the above explanations, is of far-reaching significance and cannot be overestimated: It ensures the legal status of the community and brings to an end all attempts by the courts to require the amendment of the basic structures of our By-Laws. It confirms once and for all the right of the Bahá'ís to organize as a hierarchically structured legal community according to the revealed Law of God.

111.74 The decision first of all sets a limit to its application, in a statement that is of the greatest importance as a testimony to the widespread recognition of the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religious community. It explains that the mere assertion of a community that it is a religious community is not sufficient for it to submit such a constitutional appeal. The authorities and courts have to examine in each specific case whether it is really a religion and a religious community, according to spiritual content and external appearances. Here the Court states: "In the present case it is not necessary to go more deeply into this, as the character of the Bahá'í Faith as a religion and the Bahá'í Community as a religious community is evident, in actual everyday life, cultural tradition, and in the understanding of the general public as well as of the science of comparative religion."

111.75 In its decision, the Federal Constitutional Court reviewed in detail the constitutional right of freedom of religious organization and came to the conclusion that the lower courts, in arriving at their decisions, had not done justice to this constitutional right; that it is possible, within the framework of the German civil law governing incorporations, to give special consideration to the religious requirements governing the internal organization of the Local Spiritual Assembly as a religious association and as part of a religious community; and, moreover, that Constitutional Law demands that such special consideration be given.

111.76 The Court pointed out that, because associations which are part of religious communities wish to be integrated into the hierarchy of their religious community, the granting of the right of intervention to superior institutions cannot be considered as submission to an external influence which would threaten the essential independence of the association or its right to administer itself. The Federal Constitutional Court concluded that the courts acting in this case had misunderstood the constitutional right of freedom of religious organization in the interpretation and application of the principle

of corporate autonomy, in that they had considered the National Spiritual Assembly “to be an extraneous organization, characterized by different aims and interests, exercising a dominating influence, without considering the unity and mutuality linked to religious law.” The same was true, the Court explained, for the election of the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly by the believers in the local community, who are not “third-parties.”

From the reasons given for the decision it can be inferred that a positive decision was possible only because the Bahá’í Law, which underlies our constitutions as revealed Law, is an indispensable part of our Faith. 111.77

VI.

The magnitude of the achievement this judgment represents in the efforts to preserve and ensure the legal status of the Spiritual Assemblies in Germany can be judged from the fact that only 1.5 percent of all Constitutional Appeals meet with success. 111.78

The National Spiritual Assembly had the wisdom to shrink from no effort or cost in order to ensure the best presentation of the case. It engaged a renowned Stuttgart firm of attorneys for its legal protection. The presentation of the case was in the hands of an expert in the fields of Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and State Church Law. Beyond that the National Spiritual Assembly solicited an opinion from a highly regarded expert in State Church Law at the University of Heidelberg (Professor Friedrich Müller). This profound opinion, comprising 115 pages, which clearly and convincingly sets forth the legal position of the Bahá’ís, was a great support for this Appeal and surely had an effect in helping to bring it to a successful conclusion. A gratifying side-effect of the work and funds devoted to this Appeal is to be found in the number of highly placed ministerial officials, professors and scientific collaborators, who had to concern themselves intensively with the Faith, not to mention the judges of Germany’s highest Court. The decision will be included in the collection of official records and will be published in all the legal journals. 111.79

Undoubtedly further fruits will be gathered in the years ahead when this landmark decision assists judicial authorities in other lands to appreciate the stature of the Bahá’í Faith and the fundamental importance of the laws and principles embedded in its Sacred Scriptures. 111.80

22 May 1991

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The Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God

John Robarts

19 JUNE 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

- 112.1 WITH SADDENED HEARTS ANNOUNCE PASSING MUCH-LOVED STAUNCH PROMOTER FAITH, KNIGHT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, HAND CAUSE GOD JOHN ROBARTS. HIS DISTINGUISHED ADMINISTRATIVE TEACHING PIONEERING ACTIVITIES IN HIS NATIVE CANADA, IN AFRICA AND EUROPE, DURING MINISTRY BELOVED GUARDIAN AND SUBSEQUENTLY ON WORLD SCALE THROUGH HIS INTERNATIONAL TRAVELS WERE SOURCE ABUNDANT INSPIRATION COUNTLESS FRIENDS MANY LANDS. HIS RELIANCE AND EMPHASIS ON PRAYER IN ALL EFFORTS PROMOTION CAUSE AND HIS SUSTAINED SERVICES PATH LOVE FOR BLESSED BEAUTY WERE CHARACTERIZED BY SPIRIT CERTITUDE, SELF-EFFACEMENT AND VIGOR WHICH SET A STANDARD OF STEWARDSHIP THAT HIS ENRICHED ANNALS FAITH. HE HAS ASSUREDLY EARNED BOUNTIFUL REWARD ABHÁ KINGDOM. PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL. ADVISE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS IN HIS HONOR THROUGHOUT WORLD INCLUDING ALL HOUSES WORSHIP.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

113

Commencement of Phase Two of the Mount Carmel Projects

20 JUNE 1991

To the Bahá'ís of the World

- 113.1 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.
- 113.2 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. 113.3

SUPPLICATING SACRED THRESHOLD DIVINE CONFIRMATION HISTORIC UNDERTAKING. 113.4

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

114

Progress of the Mount Carmel Projects

II SEPTEMBER 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The historic Arc and Terraces projects are now advancing at full speed, and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you of the progress being made. 114.1

The work is planned to proceed in several distinct phases. Phase One involved the strengthening and facing of the two-hundred-meter-long retaining wall supporting the main Terrace of the Shrine of the Báb. This work continued in spite of many difficulties during the Gulf crisis and has now been completed. 114.2

Phase Two, the contract for which was signed on 17 June 1991, as already announced, involves the excavation for the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives Extension, the extension eastwards of the main Terrace of the Shrine of the Báb, and the completion of eight of the Terraces below the Shrine. Work is currently in progress in three main areas, as explained below. 114.3

On the site of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives Extension a security fence has been erected around the work area to separate it from the Archives Building and the gardens below the Arc Path. Access roads have been opened to permit removal of excavated material. The first stage of excavation has been completed and rock bolts have been installed, allowing the construction of the first retaining wall to begin. 114.4

The extension of the main Terrace of the Shrine of the Báb eastward to make it symmetrical with the western half will provide a large underground storage area of great practical use in the care of the gardens. The excavations for this extension have now been completed and foundations are being laid. 114.5

114.6 On the site of the Terraces from the Shrine of the Báb leading down to 'Abbás Street, over two hundred valuable trees were carefully dug up and have been temporarily replanted on the Temple Land until they can be returned to the area of the Terraces after regrading of the mountainside. Now the remaining trees, undergrowth, topsoil and existing structures have been removed. The material from the excavations on the Arc is being moved to this area to provide the fill needed for the Terraces.

114.7 Phase Three will involve the construction of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives Extension, and is scheduled to begin in July 1992. It is to be followed by several other phases to complete the projects, and announcements about these will be made in due course.

114.8 It can thus be seen that the work is in full flow. The flow of funds to finance the work must likewise be uninterrupted. The Universal House of Justice is confident that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will bend every effort to bring to speedy completion this stage in the fulfillment of the beloved Guardian's vision of the establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Cause of God. It assures the friends in every land of its ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the successful completion of the great enterprises before the Bahá'í world at one of the most critical periods in human history.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

115

Appointment of New Continental Counselor

7 OCTOBER 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

115.1 We are happy to announce the appointment of Dr. Payman Mohajer as a new member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Asia.

115.2 He is replacing Mr. S. Nagaratnam who, due to ill health and personal circumstances, found it necessary to resign from the Board of Counselors. His resignation was regrettably accepted and his many years of dedicated service in his capacity as a Counselor are warmly remembered.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

116

Message to Bahá'í International Women's Conference, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

9 OCTOBER 1991

Bahá'í International Women's Conference

Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The contribution of women to social, economic and cultural development is paramount. As the primary educators of children, women must themselves be educated and receive literacy training. As wives and mothers, as members of the professions, as farmers, as stewards of the health and well-being of families, and as members of Bahá'í administrative institutions, women must be welcomed into full partnership with men in consultative decision-making and in guiding the progress of their communities. 116.1

We are confident of your ability to set in motion processes of development and patterns of living which, emanating from within the Bahá'í communities, will exert salutary effects on the destiny of nations. Inspired and reinforced by the guidance and life-giving properties of the Word of God, the Bahá'ís of Africa can choose to play a leading role in brightening the fortunes of their entire continent. Be assured of our heartfelt prayers at the Sacred Threshold that this conference will be a center of spiritual illumination inspiring the friends to redouble their efforts towards ensuring the unhampered, systematic involvement of women in the vital work of the Cause. 116.2

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

117

Passing of Magdalene Carney, Counselor Member of the International Teaching Center

10 OCTOBER 1991

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

DEEPLY GRIEVED SUDDEN PASSING STALWART MAIDSERVANT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH MEMBER INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER MAGDALENE M. CARNEY. HER WELL NIGH 117.1

THREE DECADES UNBROKEN SERVICE CAUSE GOD EXERTED IMMENSE INFLUENCE TEACHING WORK SOUTHERN REGION UNITED STATES, INVOLVED THIRTEEN YEARS MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY THAT COUNTRY UNTIL HER APPOINTMENT IN 1983 TO INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER. INDOMITABLE FAITH, UNSWERVING DEVOTION COVENANT; SELFLESS SPIRIT, OPEN CANDOR, WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT EDUCATION CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE AMONG QUALITIES THAT WILL EVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH GOLDEN MEMORIES HER HIGHLY ACTIVE LIFE. ARDENTLY PRAYING HOLY THRESHOLD PROGRESS HER STERLING SOUL THROUGHOUT DIVINE WORLDS.

117.2 ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL SERVICES HER HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP AND IN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT WORLD.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

118

The Need for Prepublication Review

28 OCTOBER 1991

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

118.1 . . . 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.

118.2 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.

118.3 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. . . .¹¹⁸⁻¹ 118.3a

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. 118.4

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, 118.5

118-1. LDG, p. 120.

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.”

118.6 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.

118.7 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.

118.8 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 ^{118.9} and assures you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

119

Selecting Reviewers for Bahá'í Manuscripts

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 ^{119.1} 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.¹¹⁹⁻¹ 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 ^{119.2} 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

119-1. See no. 118, pp. 240–43.

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

120

The Need for an Increase in Contributions to the Fund

18 NOVEMBER 1991

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Every Land

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

120.1 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.

120.2 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.

120.3 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 lawless-

ness 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. 120.4

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 Riḍván, 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. 120.5

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. 120.6

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. 120.7

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. 120.8

- 120.9 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.
- 120.10 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

121

Message on the Day of the Covenant

26 NOVEMBER 1991

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 121.1 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.
- 121.1a 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.
- 121.1b 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. 121.1c

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. 121.2

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. 121.3

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. 121.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

122

The Role of Assemblies in Dealing with Violations of Bahá'í Law

9 DECEMBER 1991

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of Australia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

122.1 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.

122.2 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.

122.3 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.

122.4 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. . . . 122.4a

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. 122.4b

. . . 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.¹²²⁻¹ 122.4c

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."¹²²⁻² 122.5

122-1. LDG, pp. 297–8.

122-2. LDG, p. 297; CC 2:1519; LG, no. 178; MC, pp. 39, 51.

122.6 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.

122.7 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.

122.8 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: 122.9

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.¹²²⁻³ 122.9a

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. 122.10

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: 122.11

. . . when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn 122.11a

122-3. ADJ, ¶39.

to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote. . . .¹²²⁻⁴

122.12 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:

122.12a 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. . . .¹²²⁻⁵

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:

122.12b . . . 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.¹²²⁻⁶

There are, however, many different ways in which this is applied, depending upon the nature of the offense and the situation in each case.

122.13 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

122-4. BA, p. 64.

122-5. CC 2:1401.

122-6. MC, p. 51.

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. 122.14

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. 122.15

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: 122.16

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 122.16a

obscure the vision of its followers, sap its strength, lower it in the eyes of the public and prevent it from making any progress.¹²²⁻⁷

- 122.17 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.
- 122.18 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.
- 122.19 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

122-7. LDG, p. 297.

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 ^{122.20} 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. ^{122.21}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

123

Formation of Three New Spiritual Assemblies

7 JANUARY 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

123.1 We take great joy in announcing, consequent upon the changed situation in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and further to our message of 26 November 1991, the formation next Riḍván of three additional Spiritual Assemblies in that vast area, as follows:

123.1a The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova with its seat in Kiev.

123.1b The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia with its seat in 'Ishqábád, comprising the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

123.1c The National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan with its seat in Baku.

123.2 In accordance with these changes, the former Spiritual Assembly of the USSR with its seat in Moscow will become the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

123.3 Furthermore, with the recent official recognition of the Faith in Niger, the National Spiritual Assembly of that country will also be reestablished, with its seat in Niamey.

123.4 Together with those recently announced, the number of Regional and National Spiritual Assemblies to be newly formed or reestablished at Riḍván 1992 amount to 12.

123.5 We are thrilled by such evidences of the extension of the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's administrative order at this crucial, concluding stage in the Six Year Plan. May the friends throughout the world, and particularly in the countries directly affected, derive fresh impetus from these developments, confident that every effort exerted to expand the base supporting the structure of these prospective institutions will bring untold victories at this fate-laden period in the life of the Bahá'í world community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

124

Responding to Homosexuality

1 MARCH 1992

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 22 January 1992 has been received by the Universal House of Justice, and we are to provide the following response. 124.1

The House of Justice was sorry to learn from your letter that your son has recently informed you that he is a homosexual. It commends your attitude of compassion and your efforts to both maintain harmony in your marriage and to keep open the lines of communication to your son. In answer to your specific question, there is little in the Bahá'í writings that specifically points to the causes of homosexuality itself, but as the House of Justice has emphasized in past letters to individuals who sought its advice on this question, there is much that concerns the nature of man, his inner life and growth, and the way to a true Bahá'í life. In a letter to an individual believer, the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, gave the following advice: 124.2

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature. 124.2a

To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap. 124.2b

God judges each soul on its own merits. The Guardian cannot tell you what the attitude of God would be towards a person who lives a good life in most ways, but not in this way. All he can tell you is that it is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and that one so afflicted should struggle and struggle again to overcome it. We must be hopeful of God's mercy but not impose upon it. ¹²⁴⁻¹ 124.2c

124-1. LG, no. 1223.

124.3 . . . In general, the House of Justice urges you to avoid dwelling on thoughts of guilt which you, as a parent, would likely experience, and to continue to demonstrate love and acceptance toward your son; such an attitude, however, should imply no agreement with his attitude towards homosexuality. You will, no doubt, want to urge your son to seek appropriate counseling; in this connection you are encouraged to seek the assistance of your National Spiritual Assembly, which has often dealt with such cases, and can most probably assist you in identifying individuals who are experienced in this area and whose views on homosexuality are basically compatible with those of the Bahá'í Faith.

124.4 Regarding your husband's refusal to permit your son to return home, it is understandable that a parent might feel deeply confused and angry when confronted with such questions which go to the very root of what it means to be a human being and what it means to educate and raise a child. Prayer, faith in God, loving consultation and patience will aid you to deal with this difficulty. As for your family members who are causing you further anguish, it is perhaps also to be expected that reactions to such inherently perplexing questions, nowadays compounded more than ever by the general disarray in moral thinking, tend toward extremes, either of resignation or condemnation. You are obliged to hew your own course, as illuminated by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether you can persuade anyone of the correctness of your responses, which seek to preserve your relationship to your son and also to avoid alienating your husband, is secondary; the main thing is that you strive to deal with these difficulties in a manner consistent with the spirit of the Cause of God, which is neither harsh and maledictory nor excessively liberal and forbearing.

124.5 Be assured of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that your marriage may be fortified and that your son may be divinely guided and assisted to overcome the problem which has beset him. It will also offer prayers that you may have the strength and wisdom to deal with this problem.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

125

Commemoration of Certain Bahá'í Holy Days

15 MARCH 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A number of questions have been asked concerning the exact times at which certain Bahá'í Holy Days should, if possible, be observed in view of the different times of sunset in various localities and also the use by some countries of such devices as daylight saving time. Since this matter will be of particular importance to the friends during the Holy Year, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to share the following advice with you. 125.1

As the Guardian indicated, the commemoration of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh should be held, if feasible, at 3 a.m. on 29 May, and that of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 1 a.m. on 28 November. These times should be measured according to standard time in each area. If daylight saving time is being used in the country, the commemorations should continue to be observed according to standard time. 125.2

It will be noted that, in accordance with this schedule, the observances held on each Holy Day succeed one another for an entire twenty-four hours, as the earth turns on its axis. 125.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

126

Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God

William Sears

26 MARCH 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

OUR HEARTS DEEPLY SADDENED, BAHÁ'Í WORLD GREATLY DEPRIVED, BY PASSING HAND CAUSE GOD WILLIAM SEARS, VIBRANT, CONSECRATED, STOUT-HEARTED STANDARD-BEARER FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. HIS MORE THAN HALF CENTURY UNBROKEN SERVICE MARKED BY UNFLINCHING DEVOTION TO BELOVED GUARDIAN, INFECTIOUS ENTHUSIASM FOR TEACHING, GALVANIZING SENSE DRAMA, DISARMING HUMOR, SPECIAL LOVE FOR CHILDREN, UNFLAGGING DETERMINATION IN FACE 126.1

DIFFICULTIES. HE WILL EVER BE REMEMBERED FOR DEDICATING FULL RANGE HIS CREATIVE AND ENERGETIC CAPACITIES AS WRITER, EDITOR, LECTURER, RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAM DIRECTOR, TO HIS VARIED SERVICES AS TRAVELING TEACHER TO NUMEROUS COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE AMERICAS, AND AS PIONEER TO AFRICA WHERE HE WAS MEMBER OF AUXILIARY BOARD AND OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY SOUTH AND WEST AFRICA WHEN IN 1957 HE WAS ELEVATED RANK HAND CAUSE. HE LATER SERVED AS MEMBER BODY HANDS HOLY LAND. HIS LOSS ACUTELY FELT IN NORTH AMERICA WHERE HE EXPENDED LAST MEASURE HIS EBBING STRENGTH PROMOTION TEACHING ACTIVITIES. DYNAMIC EFFECTS HIS WORK WILL ENDURE THROUGH HIS MANY BOOKS AND RECORDINGS. GENERATIONS TO COME WILL REJOICE IN RICH LEGACY LEFT THEM THROUGH HIS HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS. FERVENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS ILLUSTRIOUS SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM.

126.2 ADVISE FRIENDS THROUGHOUT WORLD COMMEMORATE HIS PASSING. REQUEST BEFITTING MEMORIAL SERVICES IN HIS HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

127

Execution of a Bahá'í in Tehran

5 APRIL 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

127.1 It is with deep distress that we inform you that news has reached us today of the execution of Mr. Bahman Samandarí at Evin Prison in Tehran probably shortly before Naw-Rúz. He was among the four friends arrested for meeting in his home about four years ago but who were released from several months of imprisonment following a global campaign in protest. Details concerning the execution are being sought. . . .

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

128

Confirmation of Execution of a Bahá'í in Tehran

8 APRIL 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With sorrowful hearts we have received confirmation of the execution ^{128.1} 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 ^{128.2} 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 ^{128.3} 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 ^{128.4} 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.

128.5 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.

128.6 As further details become known, they will be sent to you. . . .

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1992–1993

**The Holy Year
Commemorating the 100th Anniversary
of the Ascension of Bahá' u'lláh
and the Inauguration of His Covenant**

129

Riḍván Message 1992

RİḌVÁN 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

129.1 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.

129.2 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.”¹²⁹⁻¹ 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.

129.3 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,

129-1. SWAB, no. 5.1; SH, ¶152; WOB, p. 102; KA, ¶181.

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 Riḍván 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.

129.7 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.

129.8 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 ^{129.9} 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 ^{129.10} 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 ^{129.11} 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.

129.12 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 Center, 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.

129.13 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 Center 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.¹²⁹⁻² 129.14

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 129.15

129-2. ADJ, ¶103.

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.

129.16 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."¹²⁹⁻³

129.17 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 Riḍván 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 Riḍván will reach 165.

129.18 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

129-3. TDH, no. 158.14.

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. 129.19

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.”¹²⁹⁻⁴ 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. 129.20

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. 129.21

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 129.22

129-4. GPB, p. 288.

Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth.”¹²⁹⁻⁵ 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.

129.23 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.

129.24 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.”¹²⁹⁻⁶ 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.”¹²⁹⁻⁷

129.25 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

129-5. TB, p. 261.

129-6. HW, Arabic, no. 13.

129-7. GWB, no. 128.10.

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.”¹²⁹⁻⁸

Whatever our private reflections or response to duty may lead us to do, 129.26 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.”¹²⁹⁻⁹ 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 129.27 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 Riḍván 1993!

Finally, it is highly fitting at this time to recall Bahá’u’lláh’s expression in 129.28 the Most Holy Book of His will for us with regard to the nature of our reac-

129-8. TB, p. 169; ESW, p. 11; GWB, no. 47; TB, p. 169; HW, Arabic, no. 5; GWB, no. 45.

129-9. ESW, p. 46.

tions 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.”¹²⁹⁻¹⁰

^{129.29} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

130

Release of a Compilation on Proclaiming the Faith through Mass Media

3 JUNE 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

^{130.1} A few months ago, the World Congress Media Task Force, which is charged with organizing media activities in connection with the World Congress, requested the World Center to prepare a compilation of extracts from the Writings on proclaiming the Faith through mass media. When the Task Force received and studied the compilation that was prepared, they indicated that they had found it helpful and suggested that a copy be sent to National Spiritual Assemblies, as it might be equally useful to them.¹³⁰⁻¹

^{130.2} The Universal House of Justice has approved this suggestion, and it is hoped that the enclosed copy will perhaps prove to be of assistance to you, or to the national committees appointed by you, in promoting your proclamation work through the mass media.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

129-10. KA, ¶38.

130-1. The compilation enclosed with this communication is unpublished.

131

Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

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. 131.1

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. 131.2

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 Justice¹³¹⁻¹

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. 131.3

131-1. The following text was read on the occasion of the ceremony at Bahjí on the morning of 28 May 1992 for the placement of the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine.

131.4 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.

131.5 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!"¹³¹⁻²

131.6 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."¹³¹⁻³

131-2. SWB, 7:1.2.

131-3. PDC, p. 100; ESW, pp. 45, 77.

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.”¹³¹⁻⁴ 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. 131.7

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!”¹³¹⁻⁵ 131.8

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 131.9

131-4. ESW, pp. 76–77.

131-5. GPB, p. 220; ESW, p. 43.

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.

131.10 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!”¹³¹⁻⁶

131.11 As a result of the phenomenal effects of His Covenant, a world community has been raised up on an “unassailable foundation.”¹³¹⁻⁷ 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.

131.12 Bahá’u’lláh found the world in a “strange sleep.”¹³¹⁻⁸ 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

131-6. TB, p. 21.

131-7. ADJ, ¶36.

131-8. PDC, p. 6.

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.”¹³¹⁻⁹ 131.13

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.”¹³¹⁻¹⁰ 131.14

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 131.15

131-9. ADJ, ¶109; GWB, no. 96.2; ESW, p. 46.

131-10. WOB, p. 106.

cities, themselves observing in their own localities this solemn anniversary, their hearts focused on the Primal Spot here at Bahjí.

^{131.16} 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.

^{131.17} 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.”¹³¹⁻¹¹

^{131.18} 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.”¹³¹⁻¹² How then can we fail?

^{131.19} 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!”¹³¹⁻¹³

131-11. MBW, p. 155.

131-12. TB, p. 169.

131-13. ESW, p. 153.

132

Passing of Isobel Sabri, Counselor Member of the International Teaching Center

18 JUNE 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

HEARTS PROFOUNDLY SADDENED LOSS GREATLY LOVED OUTSTANDING PROMOTER 132.1
CAUSE GOD, MEMBER INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER ISOBEL SABRI. HER STER-
LING INDEFATIGABLE PIONEERING AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES OVER SEVERAL
DECADES FIRST BRITISH ISLES AND THEN AFRICA CROWNED BY UNFORGETTABLE
HIGHLY VALUED CONTRIBUTIONS WORLD CENTER SINCE 1983. INTEGRITY HER
EXEMPLARY LIFE POWERFULLY REINFORCED HER FEARLESS VALIANT UNFLAGGING
EFFORTS CHAMPION TRUTHS AND DEFEND INTERESTS FAITH SHE DEARLY CHER-
ISHED. PRAYING HOLY SHRINES CONTINUED PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS SOUL ABHÁ
KINGDOM WHERE RICH REWARD ASSUREDLY AWAITS HER. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL
SERVICES HER HONOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT
BAHÁ'Í WORLD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

133

Desecration of Bahá'í Sites in Tehran

24 JUNE 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As you are already aware from previous communications, the Bahá'í Holy 133.1
Places and other properties and endowments belonging to the Bahá'í com-
munity 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 133.2
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 133.3
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. . . .

133.4 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

134

Murder of a Bahá'í in Iran

25 JUNE 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

134.1 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.

134.2 The following details are reported by the friends in Iran:

134.2a 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.

134.2b

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.

134.2c

On 27/3/71 (17 June 1992), a man by the name of Sulaymán 'Aynu'lláhi, who used to live in Muẓaffariyyih 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.

134.2d

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.

134.2e

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).

134.2f

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

134.3

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

135

Two Bahá'ís Sentenced to Death in Iran

3 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

135.1 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. . . .

135.2 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.

135.3 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

136

Further Information on Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran

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. 136.1

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. 136.2

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. 136.3

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. 136.3a

136.3b 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.

136.3c 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.

136.3d **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."

136.3e 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.

136.3f 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.

136.4 . . . Additional information will be shared with you if and when it becomes available.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

137

Details Concerning the Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran

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. Bihnám 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. Bihnám 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.

137.2f 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’ism and continued spying activities for the Espionage Sect of Bahá’ism, 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.

137.2g 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.

137.2h 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’ism 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. 137.2i

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. 137.2j

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. 137.2k

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. 137.3i

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

138

Formulating Goals for the Three Year Plan

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 Riḍván. 138.1

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 138.2

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.

138.3 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.

138.4 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.

138.5 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.

138.6 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 138.7 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 138.8 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 138.9 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 138.10 have set them down following consultation with the Counselors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

139

Confiscation of Bahá'í Properties in Iran

30 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{139.1} We are instructed to convey to you the following disturbing news which was just received from the friends in Iran.

^{139.2} 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.

^{139.3} 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

^{139.4} In Yazd, 11 families are presently affected by such confiscations. Mr. Dáryúsh Dahmúbidi's family, residing in Taft, was already forcefully evicted and their house with all its furnishings was taken over by the Imam Khomeini Foundation.

^{139.5} 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.

Mr. 'Atá'u'lláh Lur

Mr. Khudáyár Akhtarkhávarí

Mrs. Írándukht Hakhámanishí

Mr. Jamshíd Lur

Mr. Ghulám-Ḥusayn Shád-púr
 Mr. Panj'alí A'rábí
 Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rustamí
 Mr. Ḥabíbu'lláh Tafakkurí
 Mr. 'Atá'u'lláh Rustamí
 Mr. Adíb Dánishníyá

Tehran

In Tehran, three cases were reported, as follows:

139.6

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.

139.6a

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.

139.6b

Mrs. Mawhibatí was forcefully evicted from her home after being served an order by the Attorney-General that her house was confiscated.

139.6c

Isfahan

In Isfahan, the following cases were reported:

139.7

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.

139.7a

139.7b Perhaps the most tragic case is that of Mr. Aḥmad Iṣhráqí, 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. Iṣhráqí 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.

139.7c 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.

139.8 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

140

The Station of Bahá'u'lláh

15 OCTOBER 1992

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

140.1 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.

140.2 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.”¹⁴⁰⁻¹ 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.”¹⁴⁰⁻² 140.3

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.¹⁴⁰⁻³ 140.3a

140-1. *GWB*, nos. 82.1, 82.6.

140-2. *GWB*, no. 22.4.

140-3. *GWB*, no. 22.10.

140.4 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.

140.5 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:

140.5a 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.¹⁴⁰⁻⁴

At another time, as published in *Gleanings L*, He wrote:

140.5b 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:

140.5c It was in such dramatic circumstances, recalling the experience of Moses when face to face with the Burning Bush in the wilderness of

140-4. SH, ¶44.

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.”¹⁴⁰⁻⁵

On a related subject, the following reply to a question from an individual believer was written on behalf of the Guardian 19 October 1947: 140.6

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.¹⁴⁰⁻⁶ 140.6a

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.”¹⁴⁰⁻⁷ This is analogous to Bahá'u'lláh's 140.7

140-5. TDH, no. 158.19.

140-6. LG, no. 1552.

140-7. See no. 90, p. 160–67.

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.”¹⁴⁰⁻⁸ 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:

^{140.7a} 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.¹⁴⁰⁻⁹

^{140.8} 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.

^{140.9} 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

140-8. WOB, p. 125.
140-9. GWB, no. 13.6.

141

Responsibilities of Youth in the Bahá'í Community

28 OCTOBER 1992

To two individual Bahá'ís

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has considered the concerns expressed ^{141.1} 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 ^{141.2} 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.”¹⁴¹⁻¹ 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 ^{141.3} institutions in relation to their respective responsibilities. For instance:

- The youth face the pressing obligation of completing their education so as to acquire a profession or trade while at the same time ^{141.3a} observing their other spiritual obligations and duties to God.
- Parents have the responsibility of ensuring that their children are ^{14.3b} 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

141-1. GWB, no. 128.10, 161.2.

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.

- 141.3c - 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.

141.4 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.

141.5 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.

141.6 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. 141.7

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. 141.8

^{141.9} 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.¹⁴¹⁻²

^{141.10} 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

142

Resignation of Two Members of the Universal House of Justice

11 NOVEMBER 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Beloved Friends,

^{142.1} Conscious of the increasing burden of advancing years and the effect of this on the services they can render, Mr. Hugh E. Chance and Dr. David S. Ruhe have, after prayerful consideration of the best interests of the Cause of God, requested permission to relinquish their membership on the Universal House of Justice, in accordance with Article V.2.(c) of its Constitution.

^{142.2} The House of Justice has regretfully accepted the resignation of these beloved members, who have rendered highly valued services in the Holy Land, since 1963 in Mr. Chance's case, and since 1968 in that of Dr. Ruhe. They will thus be able to continue their services to the Cause of God free from the inexorable pressure of work at the World Center. In view, however, of the imminence of the next international election, we have requested them to remain in office until that time, and to this they have readily agreed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

141-2. See MUHJ, no. 37.

143

Message to the Participants of the First National Congress of the Bahá'ís of Bangladesh

19 NOVEMBER 1992

At this auspicious time, when Bahá'ís throughout the world are celebrating the Day of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, we hail the participants in the first National Congress of the Bahá'ís of Bangladesh, who have gathered to pay tribute to the life-giving Teachings of our Faith and to enhance their role in the service of their country and the promotion of the unity of mankind. 143.1

The wonderful achievements of your community in recent years have demonstrated that the people of Bangladesh are endowed with great spiritual capacity enabling them to recognize divine truth when it is presented to them. Once enlisted under the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, they become highly motivated and arise in the promotion of the Word of God and the cause of peace in this world. This augurs well for the progress and future prosperity of that nation. 143.2

The Bahá'í community of Bangladesh has already established itself in the annals of the Formative Age of our Faith as a staunch pillar of devotion and selfless endeavor in the service of the Cause, and this has been an inspiration to many. The freedom they enjoy in pursuing their beneficial activities is a credit to the farsightedness of the leaders of that country who are seeking to guide that nation into a brighter future. 143.3

One of the great challenges before the people of Bangladesh, and the Bahá'í community in particular, is to foster better understanding and amity between the various sectors of the population and to promote its social and economic development. The Bahá'ís must show by their actions that the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh not only create harmony and convey deep spiritual insights, but they also offer practical solutions to many problems of this age and are able to effect the much needed spiritual transformation, beginning at the grassroots level and embracing all strata of society. 143.4

You may be assured that prayers will be offered at the Sacred Threshold for the success of this historic gathering, and that we will beseech Bahá'u'lláh to grant success to the people of your country in their struggle for spiritual and material progress. 143.5

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

144

Message to the Second Bahá'í World Congress

23 NOVEMBER 1992¹⁴⁴⁻¹

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh attending the second Bahá'í World Congress
Dearly loved Friends,

^{144.1} 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.

^{144.2} 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 fulfill-

144-1. This Message was delivered via satellite during final day of the second Bahá'í World Congress, held in New York City, 23–26 November 1992.

ment 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? 144.3

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. 144.4

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 144.5

one of these high-ranking officers, the consort and helpmate of our beloved Guardian who herself attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

144.6 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.

144.7 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.

144.8 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. 144.9

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

145

Message on the Centennial of the Day of the Covenant

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. 145.1

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. 145.2

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. 145.3

145.4 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.

145.5 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.

145.6 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.

145.7 These ominous comments reflect the universal consequences of a failed understanding as to the purpose of God for humankind. It is in this par-

ticular 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."¹⁴⁵⁻¹

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."¹⁴⁵⁻² 145.8

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."¹⁴⁵⁻³ 145.9

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, 145.10

145-1. *GWB*, no. 109.2.

145-2. *ADJ*, ¶101.

145-3. *TB*, p. 125.

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.”¹⁴⁵⁻⁴

^{145.11} 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.

^{145.12} 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.

^{145.13} 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.”¹⁴⁵⁻⁵ 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

145-4: WOB, p. 187.

145-5: WOB, p. 43.

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. 145.14

“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.”¹⁴⁵⁻⁶ 145.15

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 145.16

145-6. ADJ, ¶108.

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."¹⁴⁵⁻⁷

^{145.17} 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."¹⁴⁵⁻⁸

^{145.18} 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."¹⁴⁵⁻⁹

145-7. *GWB*, nos. 4.2, 70.1.

145-8. *WOB*, p. 41.

145-9. *WOB*, p. 41.

It is especially noteworthy that coincidental with this Bahá'í Holy Year ^{145.19} 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 ^{145.20} 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.¹⁴⁵⁻¹⁰ 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, ^{145.21} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

145-10. GPB, p. 288.

146

Success of the Second Bahá'í World Congress

3 DECEMBER 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

^{146.1} The Bahá'í World Congress held in New York, the second major event of the Holy Year, ended on the Day of the Covenant in a blaze of celestial glory. Far exceeding the brightest expectation anyone might have entertained, it was a triumph of the spirit in which, on all continents, the friends in their magnificent diversity witnessed a solidarity of the Bahá'í world community at a level new to their experience. Our hearts have not the capacity to contain, nor our minds the language to express, our joy and gratitude at the conspicuous outpouring of divine confirmations which made possible such a spectacular celebration and proclamation of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

^{146.2} The unity engendered among the 27,000 multifarious participants from almost 180 countries evinced a new dynamic, which signifies a stage of evolvement of the Faith which was not evident before. We noted with immense gratification the magnetic and transformative effects of this manifestation of unity arising from a quality of personal conduct which, on such a vast, collective scale as was realized at the World Congress, certainly indicated the new stature of a people becoming seasoned in the truths and virtues of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh; and in this we recognize one of the enduring gifts of the Holy Year.

^{146.3} As for those who devoted their specialized talents and expertise towards meeting the programmatic and logistical challenges of this conglomerate occasion, and the thousands of eager volunteers who staffed the event, our admiration and loving appreciation know no bounds.

^{146.4} Vitalized by such evidences of the potency of the Covenant as the Congress displayed, may the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, wherever they reside and whatever their personal circumstances, derive fresh courage and demonstrate new determination in carrying forward the momentum so magnificently reinforced by the astounding success of the proclamation raised in the City of the Covenant.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

147

Establishment of an Office for the Advancement of Women

10 DECEMBER 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We take much pleasure in announcing the decision to establish an Office ^{147.1} for the Advancement of Women, which, as an agency of the Bahá'í International Community, will promote the principles of the Faith through its interaction with international entities concerned with matters affecting the rights, status and well-being of women. It will also advise National Spiritual Assemblies regarding programs and projects in which the involvement of the community can encourage efforts towards the realization of the equality of men and women.

The establishment of this Office now is largely a consequence of two ^{147.2} gratifying developments, namely: the great extent to which the work of our United Nations Office concerning women's issues has expanded in recent years; and the rising stature for the Bahá'í community which this work has achieved in international circles. We are delighted that, for instance, the Bahá'í International Community has been serving since 1988 as the convener of Advocates for African Food Security, a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental bodies formed in 1986 to raise awareness of women as producers of most of the domestic food in Africa; that our United Nations representative who specializes in women's issues is a member of the Steering Committee which is planning the Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum to be held in Beijing in 1995 at the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women; and that she chairs the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York, a position of great prestige in the UN/NGO community. Furthermore, the relations of the Bahá'í International Community with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) have fostered a mutual confidence that has encouraged UNIFEM to collaborate with the Bahá'í International Community in the launching in three countries of projects aimed at promoting change in attitudes between men and women. All three projects involve the Bahá'í community at international, national and local levels.

147.3 The inauguration of the Office for the Advancement of Women, as a companion of the other offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York, is a further significant step in the administration of the external affairs of the Faith and, of course, provides our community with a visible instrument for the practical application of one of the cardinal principles of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

148

Initiation of Third Phase of Mount Carmel Projects

17 DECEMBER 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

- 148.1 DELIGHTED ANNOUNCE INITIATION PHASE THREE MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.
- 148.2 FOLLOWING PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WITH HAIFA MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES NECESSARY PERMITS FOR EXCAVATION SITE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER AND FOR COMMENCEMENT UPPER TERRACES WERE OBTAINED IN SEPTEMBER 1992. FURTHER CONTRACTS AMOUNTING TO FIVE AND A HALF MILLION DOLLARS HAVE BEEN AWARDED AND EARTHWORK ON BOTH SITES HAS BEGUN ON 9 DECEMBER 1992.
- 148.3 CONFIDENT FOLLOWERS BLESSED BEAUTY THROUGHOUT BAHÁ'Í WORLD WILL CONTINUE THEIR UNSTINTING SUPPORT THESE HISTORIC PROJECTS THUS ENSURING UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS CONSTRUCTION.
- 148.4 ARDENTLY SUPPLICATING SACRED THRESHOLD CONFIRMATIONS SPEEDY EXECUTION MAJOR UNDERTAKING ESTABLISHMENT SEATS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FAITH ON GOD'S HOLY MOUNTAIN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

149

Importance of Nonviolence in Families

24 JANUARY 1993

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

- 149.1 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. 149.2

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated: 149.3

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. . . .¹⁴⁹⁻¹ 149.3a

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."¹⁴⁹⁻² 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. 149.4

149-1. PUP, pp. 232–33.

149-2. SWAB, no. 129.11.

149.5 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.

149.6 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.

149.7 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."¹⁴⁹⁻³

149-3. PUP, p. 105.

The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encourage- 149.8
ment 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 trans- 149.9
gression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has 149.9a
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.¹⁴⁹⁻⁴

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 con-
sultation. 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 149.10
on the subject of the treatment of women:

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, 149.10a
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, spea-
keth the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants
and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the
next.¹⁴⁹⁻⁵

149-4. LG, no. 2079.

149-5. CC 2:2145.

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.

^{149.11} 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."¹⁴⁹⁻⁶

^{149.12} 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.

^{149.13} 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."¹⁴⁹⁻⁷ In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual

149-6. *GWB*, nos. 136.6, 60.3.

149-7. *LG*, no. 1156.

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. . . .¹⁴⁹⁻⁸

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.

149-8. LG, no. 510.

^{149.16} 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,”¹⁴⁹⁻⁹ 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.

^{149.17} 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.

^{149.18} 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

149-9. WOB, p. 187.

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: 149.19

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. 149.19a

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

150

Publication of English Translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

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 150.1

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”¹⁵⁰⁻¹—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.

150.2 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.’”¹⁵⁰⁻² 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.

150.3 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.”¹⁵⁰⁻³

150-1. PDIC, ¶51.

150-2. GPB, p. 213.

150-3. MBW, p. 78; GPB, p. 213.

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. 150.4

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. 150.5

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."¹⁵⁰⁻⁴ 150.6

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

150-4. TB, pp. 267, 200.

1993–1996

The Three Year Plan

151

Riḍván Message 1993

RIDVÁN 150

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

151.1 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.

151.2 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. 151.3

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."¹⁵¹⁻¹ 151.4

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 151.5

151-1. SAQ, p. 164.

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.

151.6 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.

151.7 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.

151.8 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?”¹⁵¹⁻² 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. 151.9

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. 151.10

151-2. *GWB*, no. 99.

151.11 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 Center, 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.

151.12 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.

151.13 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."¹⁵¹⁻³ 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

151-3. CF, p. 130.

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. 151.14

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

152

Election of the Universal House of Justice— Riḍván 1993

30 APRIL 1993

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

ANNOUNCE NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE 'ALÍ NAKHJAVÁNÍ, GLENFORD MITCHELL, ADIB TAHERZADEH, IAN SEMPLE, PETER KHAN, HUSHMAND FATHEAZAM, HOOPER DUNBAR, FARZAM ARBAB, DOUGLAS MARTIN. 152.1

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

153

Applicability of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

9 MAY 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the introduction to the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is stated that its publication does not increase the number of laws which are 153.1

binding on Bahá'ís. As an assistance to those friends who may not have a clear understanding of the matter, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you the attached copy of a letter which it wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iceland, on 9 June 1974, to identify those laws which were not then universally applicable.¹⁵³⁻¹ The law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was applied universally at Riḍván 1992. In due course, the Universal House of Justice will announce further applications of the laws when the friends have had the opportunity of familiarizing themselves with the Most Holy Book and when it is propitious to do so.

^{153.2} National Spiritual Assemblies are asked to share this letter and its enclosure with the friends under their jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

154

Appointment of International Teaching Center Members

13 MAY 1993

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

^{154.1} WITH JOYFUL HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUNSELOR MEMBERS INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1993: MR. KISER BARNES, MR. HARTMUT GROSSMANN, MRS. LAURETTA KING, MRS. JOAN LINCOLN, MR. SHAPOOR MONADJEM, MR. DONALD ROGERS, MR. FRED SCHECHTER, MRS. KIMIKO SCHWERIN, MRS. JOY STEVENSON. PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL MR. MAS'ÚD KHAMSÍ AND MR. PETER VUYIYA FOR ILLUSTRIOUS RECORD YEARS DEVOTED LABORS IN DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE OPERATION THIS VITAL INSTITUTION.
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

153-1. See MUHJ, no. 147.

155

Confiscation of Bahá'í Properties in Iran

20 MAY 1993

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

This is in reference to our circular letter dated 30 September 1992 concerning the confiscation of Bahá'í properties in various cities of Iran. A copy of that letter is being forwarded herewith to all National Spiritual Assemblies marked with an asterisk, as they have not previously received it. 155.1

We are instructed to draw your attention to the fact that the confiscations of the properties of the Bahá'ís in Yazd are of a different nature than those taking place elsewhere in the country. In Yazd, they are based on a religious edict issued by the late Áyatu'lláh Şadúqí, former Imam of Yazd. This edict is now being invoked by the authorities in Yazd to justify their decision that no Bahá'í in that city may possess any property or engage in any transactions involving properties. 155.2

The confiscation of properties and the prohibition of Bahá'ís to be engaged in any property transactions clearly constitute religious persecution, as the individuals concerned are not being punished for any wrongdoing, but are deprived of their properties on the basis of belonging to a particular religious community. 155.3

In the meantime, the Bahá'ís of SAYSÁN and ÍLKHCÍ have reported confiscations of their properties on the grounds that they are members of the Bahá'í community. . . . 155.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

156

Appointment of Four New Continental Counselors

16 JUNE 1993

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT FOLLOWING CONTINENTAL COUNSELORS TO FILL VACANCIES CREATED BY RECENT APPOINTMENTS TO INTERNATIONAL TEACH- 156.1

ING CENTER: IN AFRICA KOBINA FYNN, IN THE AMERICAS STEPHEN BIRKLAND AND FARHAD SHAYANI, IN ASIA NOBUKO IWAKURA.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

157

Consultations between the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Center

24 JUNE 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

¹⁵⁷¹ 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 Center, 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.

¹⁵⁷² 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 Center as the world advances through the climacteric years at the close of the twentieth century.

¹⁵⁷³ During the five years since May 1988, when far-reaching decisions were made on the functioning of the International Teaching Center 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.

¹⁵⁷⁴ 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 under-

standing 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. 1575

The responsibility of the Continental Boards of Counselors to protect the Faith, under the guidance of the International Teaching Center, 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. 1576

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 Center will contribute significantly to the advancement of such study. 1577

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. 1578

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 Center, 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 1579

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.

157.10 All the above matters were among the subjects of consultation between the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Center 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.

157.11 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,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

158

Visit to the Bahá'í World Center of Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

25 JUNE 1993

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

158.1 DELIGHTED INFORM FRIENDS VISIT BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTER 12 JUNE 1993 SIR JULIUS CHAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PAPUA NEW GUINEA, ACCOMPANIED BY LADY CHAN DURING COURSE OFFICIAL VISIT ISRAEL. HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT THAT UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE MET WITH SIR JULIUS CHAN IN RESPONSE HIS REQUEST FOR CONSULTATION ON FUTURE ROLE PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS EMERGING NATION AND ON DESTINY PACIFIC REGION. MEETING HELD COUNCIL CHAMBER FOCUSED POTENTIAL PACIFIC NATIONS SET EXAMPLE UNITY, MUTUAL COOPERATION. SIR JULIUS EXPRESSED APPRECIATION ACHIEVEMENTS BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AND ADMIRATION BAHÁ'Í APPROACH PERSONAL, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION. MEETING WITH SIR JULIUS CHAN, FOLLOWING EARLIER MEETINGS PRIME MINISTER COOK ISLANDS AND PRESIDENT MARSHALL ISLANDS, FURTHER EVIDENCE REMARKABLE RESPONSE PACIFIC LEADERS PRINCIPLES BAHÁ'Í FAITH, HARBINGER FUTURE APPLICATION BY WORLD STATESMEN PRESCRIPTION DIVINE PHYSICIAN HEALING MANIFOLD ILLS HUMANITY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

159

Four Categories of Pioneers for the Three Year Plan

27 JUNE 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Integral to the success and development of the Cause of God is the continual deployment of pioneers and traveling teachers throughout the world. During the course of the Six Year Plan more than 4,000 Bahá'ís left their homes to serve as either short-term or long-term pioneers in other lands. This is an indication of the increased mobility that the modern world provides, and of the believers' eagerness to advance the Cause wherever the need is greatest. It suggests that new methods must be adopted to make the best use of this massive flow of Bahá'ís. 159.1

We have therefore decided, in consultation with the International Teaching Center, to adopt a new pattern for the pioneer call for the Three Year Plan. 159.2

The essence of this method is that friends may arise from anywhere in the world to pioneer to any other part of the world. There are very few places where long-term and short-term pioneers and traveling teachers are not needed. But the needs vary in nature, intensity and urgency. To help each volunteer to choose his or her goal, a list of four categories has been prepared to indicate the particular needs. These four categories comprise countries and territories where: 159.3

1. there are now especially fertile opportunities for the rapid spread of the Faith that must be urgently met; 159.3a
2. the Faith is established, but pioneers are needed to stimulate the process of growth and to assist in the opening of new centers; 159.3b
3. the process of expansion and consolidation has a significant momentum, but there is a need for pioneers who can undertake specific tasks, such as arousing the interest of prominent people, strengthening the communities in certain areas, or assisting with projects of social and economic development; 159.3c
4. pioneers are greatly needed, but entry is difficult because of restrictions on Bahá'í activity, lack of security, or other circumstances. These conditions present a need for believers who will resourcefully seek out opportunities for pioneering. 159.3d

159.4 The list is attached to this letter for the information of every Bahá'í. Additional detailed information about many of the countries is being supplied to National Spiritual Assemblies and also to the Continental Boards of Counselors and Continental Pioneer Committees. Both the list and detailed information will be periodically updated as the outflow of pioneers and traveling teachers begins to meet current needs. Notification of areas of especially urgent concern will also be supplied from time to time.

159.5 Many National Assemblies have offered, among their international collaboration goals, to raise up a given number of pioneers and traveling teachers during the Three Year Plan. But, as indicated above, even from those countries which have specified no such goal, the friends should feel free to offer their services.

159.6 Any Bahá'í who has the urge to serve as a traveling teacher, or as a pioneer for a short or long term, should immediately contact his (or her) National Spiritual Assembly or appropriate national committee to obtain advice and additional information. He can also consult a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member, and write to a Continental Pioneer Committee. Through prayer and consultation, and after considering his own particular experience, inclinations and possibilities, he can choose his goal area and, confidently relying on the confirming power of Bahá'u'lláh, set out to serve the Cause of his Lord in distant lands.

159.7 There are still vast areas of the world where no Bahá'ís have set foot. There are millions desperately thirsting for this Water of Life. There are countries where believers are laboring day and night to foster the growth of the tree of the Cause, and are in urgent need of reinforcements. It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that stalwart, self-sacrificing friends will arise and that a wave of pioneers and traveling teachers will surge forth to raise the banner of the Cause and reinforce the cohorts of God in every land.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

160

Securing Building Contractors for Mount Carmel Projects

27 JUNE 1993

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world

REJOICE ANNOUNCE MAJOR ADVANCE MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS BY ISSUANCE TENDER DOCUMENTS TO BUILDING CONTRACTORS FOR CONSTRUCTION CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS. DEVELOPMENT TERRACES ALSO PROCEEDING APACE. SACRIFICIAL EFFORT NOW NEEDED FRIENDS ALL LANDS CONTRIBUTION SEVENTY-FOUR MILLION DOLLARS ARC PROJECTS FUND DURING THREE YEAR PLAN ENSURE UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS RAPIDLY ACCELERATING CONSTRUCTION WORK. 160.1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

161

Pioneer Needs for the Three Year Plan

30 JUNE 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The pioneer call raised by the Universal House of Justice on 27 June 1993 apprised the Bahá'í world of the new pattern that has been adopted for the Three Year Plan to facilitate the swift and effective movement of international pioneers and traveling teachers. To assist in this process, the attached document, consisting of brief descriptions of the pioneer needs in various countries and territories, has been prepared by the International Teaching Center based on information received from National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Counselors. For ease of reference, the list of the four categories of countries and territories included in the pioneer call is also attached. 161.1

As you will see, the document is not a complete listing of pioneer needs. Only those countries and territories for which some information was available at the time of preparation are included. However, the document will be periodically updated and National Spiritual Assemblies are urged to send a statement of their needs to the Bahá'í World Center. It is also hoped that, 161.2

as conditions change and needs are met, the World Center will be notified accordingly.

161.3 It is anticipated that many as yet unforeseen opportunities for the rapid expansion of the Faith will present themselves during the coming three years. Therefore, in addition to the periodic updating of the attached document, there may be occasions when attention will be drawn to specific urgent needs for pioneers and traveling teachers.

161.4 As the friends respond to the pioneer call, the National Spiritual Assemblies and their appropriate agencies will, of course, exert their utmost to offer the administrative support to facilitate their move. However, the approach adopted for the Three Year Plan should free the institutions from the pressure of filling specific goals and allow them to focus their energies on the spiritual preparation of the friends for this vital field of service.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**Countries and Territories
In Need of Pioneers and Traveling Teachers
June 1993**

CATEGORY 1

161.5 The following are countries and territories where there are now especially fertile opportunities for the rapid spread of the Faith that must be urgently met. For each country or territory without its own National Spiritual Assembly, the name of the responsible or assisting National Assembly, or Regional Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it falls, is in parentheses.

Africa

Benin	Equatorial Guinea
Congo Republic	Guinea
Djibouti (Ethiopia)	Guinea-Bissau

Americas

Nicaragua

Asia

Asiatic Russia, including Sakhalin (Russia, Georgia and Armenia)	Kirgyzstan
Azerbaijan	Mongolia (Singapore)
Cambodia (Thailand)	Turkmenistan (Central Asia)
Georgia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia)	Uzbekistan (Central Asia)
Kazakhstan (Central Asia)	

Europe

Albania	Poland
Belarus (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova)	Russia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia)
Bulgaria	Serbia and Montenegro (Austria)
Croatia (Austria)	Slovak Republic (Czech and Slovak Republics)
Czech Republic (Czech and Slovak Republics)	Slovenia (Austria)
Hungary	Ukraine (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova)
Macedonia (Austria)	Moldova (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova)

CATEGORY 2

The following are countries and territories where the Faith is established, 161.6 but pioneers are needed to stimulate the process of growth and to assist in the opening of new centers. For each country or territory without its own National Spiritual Assembly, the name of the responsible or assisting National Assembly, or Regional Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it falls, is in parentheses.

Africa

Bophuthatswana	Namibia
Botswana	Niger
Burkina	Réunion
Burundi	Rwanda
Cape Verde	Sao Tome and Principe (Nigeria)
Central African Republic	Senegal
Ciskei	Seychelles
Gabon	Sierra Leone
Gambia	St. Helena (South Africa)

Lesotho	Tanzania
Madagascar	Transkei
Malawi	Uganda
Mali	Venda (South Africa)

Americas

Argentina	Guadeloupe
Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (Venezuela)	Guatemala
Bahamas	Martinique
Bermuda	Mexico
Chile	Paraguay
Dominica	Puerto Rico
East Leeward Islands	St. Lucia
Falkland Islands (United States)	St. Vincent and the Grenadines
French Guiana	Virgin Islands
Greenland	West Leeward Islands
Grenada	

Asia

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Sri Lanka
Korea, South	Thailand

Australasia

Cook Islands	New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands
Eastern Caroline Islands	Solomon Islands
Fiji Islands	Tonga
Kiribati	Tuvalu
Mariana Islands	Vanuatu
Marshall Islands	Western Caroline Islands
Nauru (Kiribati)	

Europe

Andorra (Spain)	Gibraltar (United Kingdom)
Azores (Portugal)	Greece
Belgium	Latvia (Baltic States)
Channel Islands (United Kingdom)	Liechtenstein (Switzerland)
Corsica (France)	Lithuania (Baltic States)
Cyprus	Madeira (Portugal)
Denmark	Malta (Italy)
Elba (Italy)	Monaco (France)
Estonia (Baltic States)	Portugal
Faroe Islands (Iceland)	Sardinia (Italy)
Finland	Spitsbergen (Norway)

CATEGORY 3

The following are countries and territories where the process of expansion and consolidation has a significant momentum, but there is a need for pioneers who can undertake specific tasks, such as arousing the interest of prominent people, strengthening the communities in certain areas, or assisting with projects of social and economic development. 161.7

Africa

Cameroon	Mauritius
Chad	Nigeria
Côte d'Ivoire	South Africa
Ethiopia	Swaziland
Ghana	Zambia
Kenya	Zimbabwe

Americas

Barbados	Guyana
Belize	Haiti
Bolivia	Honduras
Brazil	Panama
Colombia	Peru
Costa Rica	Suriname

Dominican Republic	Trinidad and Tobago
Ecuador	Uruguay
El Salvador	Venezuela

Asia

Bangladesh	Malaysia
Hong Kong	Pakistan
India	Philippines
Japan	Taiwan
Macau	

Australasia

Papua New Guinea	Samoa
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Europe

Canary Islands	Romania
Iceland	

CATEGORY 4

161.8 The following are countries and territories where pioneers are greatly needed, but entry is difficult because of restrictions on Bahá'í activity, lack of security, or other circumstances. These conditions present a need for believers who will resourcefully seek out opportunities for pioneering. For each country or territory without its own National Spiritual Assembly, the name of the responsible or assisting National Assembly, or Regional Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it falls, is in parentheses. Any believer interested in pioneering or travel-teaching in particularly sensitive areas should contact the Bahá'í World Center as indicated below.

Africa

Angola	Mozambique
Comoros (Kenya)	Somalia (Kenya)
Liberia (Bahá'í World Center)	Togo
Mauritania (Bahá'í World Center)	Zaire

Americas

Cuba

Asia

Afghanistan	Laos
Armenia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia)	Maldives (India)
Bhutan (India)	Myanmar
Brunei (Malaysia)	Nepal
Indonesia (Bahá'í World Center)	Tadzhikistan (Central Asia)
Korea, North	Vietnam (Malaysia)

Australasia

French Polynesia	Wallis and Futana (New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands)
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162

Using Wisdom in Teaching the Cause

30 JUNE 1993

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received on . . . your letter concerning the 162.1
teaching activities in . . . , and we have been asked to convey the following
response to you. . . .

It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching 162.2
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 remon-
strances have met with no satisfying response from those institutions.

The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, 162.3
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.

^{162.4} 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.

^{162.5} In one of its messages, published on page 32 of *Wellspring of Guidance*, the Universal House of Justice gave the following advice:

^{162.5a} 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.¹⁶²⁻¹

^{162.6} 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

162-1. MUHJ, no. 18.4.

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. 162.7

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: 162.8

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 162.8a

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)*¹⁶²⁻²

^{162.9} 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

163

Personal Sacrifice in Giving to the Fund

1 JULY 1993

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

^{163.1} 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.

^{163.2} 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

162-2. ADJ, ¶78 (2006).

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 Ḥuququ'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: 163.4

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.¹⁶³⁻¹ 163.4a

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.¹⁶³⁻² 163.4b

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. 163.5

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 163.6

163-1. HW, Persian, no. 82.

163-2. TB, p. 26.

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.

^{163.7} 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

164

Applicability of Bahá'í Laws to Western Believers

4 JULY 1993

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

^{164.1} . . . 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.

^{164.2} 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 1993,¹⁶⁴⁻¹ 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.

^{164.3} 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.

^{164.4} 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

164-1. See no. 154, p. 334.

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 ^{164.5} 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” ^{164.6} 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

165

Laws Regarding Hair and Manner of Dress

15 AUGUST 1993

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 16 July 1993 ^{165.1} expressing your concern over the wearing of long hair and earrings by some of the students of the . . . School, and conveying your view that the School should enforce Bahá'í standards as a condition for enrollment. We have been instructed to send you the following reply.

165.2 As you are aware, the Blessed Perfection Himself advised that the utmost wisdom should be exercised in applying the Sacred Laws, and it is only gradually that these have been enforced in the Bahá'í community. Indeed, as the beloved Guardian stated, certain of the laws are designed for a future state of society.

165.3 The law of the Aqdas that, in the case of men, “. . . it is not seemly to let the hair pass beyond the limit of the ears”¹⁶⁵⁻¹ has not yet been universally applied. Bahá'u'lláh's statement is in the Most Holy Book for all to read, but its application should be left to the discretion of each individual. It is not fitting at this time for either Bahá'í institutions or individual believers to make an issue of this matter or attempt to enforce it on other believers.

165.4 As for the wearing of earrings, nothing at all has been found in the Holy Texts on this matter beyond the general counsel given by Bahá'u'lláh in paragraph 159 of the Aqdas, namely:

165.4a The Lord hath relieved you, as a bounty on His part, of the restrictions that formerly applied to clothing and to the trim of the beard. He, verily, is the Ordainer, the Omniscient. Let there be naught in your demeanor of which sound and upright minds would disapprove, and make not yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. Well is it with him who hath adorned himself with the vesture of seemly conduct and a praiseworthy character. He is assuredly reckoned with those who aid their Lord through distinctive and outstanding deeds.

165.5 It is, of course, within the discretion of an institution such as a school to lay down codes of dress and behavior for its pupils. In this it must show good judgment in the light of Bahá'í principles and in the context of the culture in which it operates.

165.6 If you wish to convey your recommendations to the . . . School you are, of course, entirely free to do so.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

165-1. KA, ¶43.

166

Preservation of Original Sacred Text

23 AUGUST 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are forwarding to you a copy of a leaflet concerning the preservation and safeguarding of the original Sacred Texts which was distributed to all delegates and guests at the seventh International Bahá'í Convention. It is requested that you bring the information conveyed in the leaflet to the attention of the members of your community in whatever way you consider to be the most effective. 166.1

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh has revealed the following: 166.2

Thou shouldst alert the company of the faithful to the need for all to exert every effort and to spare no pains in preserving and honoring the Tablets and Holy Writings. Blessed the regions in which the fragrance of the Pen of the Most High is spread abroad. The preservation of the peerless, incomparable and blessed Tablets is highly requisite and beloved in the sight of God, lest either the pages of which they are composed or the ink in which they are inscribed should lose their pristine quality. Do thou guide and instruct the friends in the method of preservation. . . . Blessed be those who do His bidding. 166.2a

It is hoped that those friends who have original Tablets, or letters of the beloved Guardian, in their possession will thereby be reminded of the utmost importance of preserving these precious and sacred documents. They are encouraged to consider giving either the originals, or clear photocopies of them, to the International Bahá'í Archives. 166.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

167

Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and Private Initiatives

2 SEPTEMBER 1993

To a National Spiritual Assembly

167.1 . . . 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.

167.2 The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of non-profit 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

168

Recitation of the Prayer for the Dead

13 SEPTEMBER 1993

Maison d’Éditions Bahá’íes

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

We regret that we cannot answer your fax of 26 August 1993 in French, as requested, but we enclose a French translation of this letter in the hope that it will assist you.

The correct way of reciting the Prayer for the Dead is as follows:

Alláh-u-Abhá (once) 168.2a

We all, verily, worship God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, bow down before God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, are devoted unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, give praise unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, are patient in God (19 times)

168.3 When the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was being translated it was noted that the English translation of the instructions which form part of the Prayer for the Dead could be understood in more than one way. Therefore, when Note 11 was formulated it was expressed in a way that was intended to clarify the ambiguity, namely: “the repetition of the greeting ‘Alláh-u-Abhá’ (God is the All Glorious) six times, each followed by nineteen repetitions of one of the six specifically revealed verses.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

169

Use of the Term “Bahá’í Scholarship”

19 OCTOBER 1993

To an individual Bahá’í
Dear Bahá’í Friend,

169.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter . . . inquiring about the term “Bahá’í scholarship.” . . .

169.2 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:

169.2a 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. . . .¹⁶⁹⁻¹

169.3 It is evident that the Bahá’í Writings illuminate all areas of human endeavor and all academic disciplines. Those who have been privileged to rec-

169-1. TB, p. 96.

ognize 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. 169.4

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: 169.5

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. 169.5a

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: 169.6

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. . . . 169.6a

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that: 169.7

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 169.7a

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.¹⁶⁹⁻²

169.8 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:

169.8a 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.¹⁶⁹⁻³

169.9 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:

169.9a 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.

169.9b A similar diversity should characterize the endeavors pursued by Bahá'í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as

169-2. CC 1:506.

169-3. KI, ¶77.

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. 169.10

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: 169.11

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. 169.11a

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 169.11b

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.

169.12 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

170

Reformat of *The Bahá’í World Series*

28 OCTOBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

170.1 The Universal House of Justice has decided that *The Bahá’í World* should have a new format and be published annually. Such frequency of appearance was intended by Shoghi Effendi when the publication was founded, but circumstances made it impossible to produce it so regularly. The first volume of the new annual series is scheduled to be published by the end of December 1993 and will focus on the Holy Year.

170.2 Beginning in 1926 as *Bahá’í Year Book*, this publication has remained a major record of Bahá’í activities and achievements. Assuming the title *The*

Bahá'í World, each volume from the second to the tenth appeared biennially; subsequent volumes until the nineteenth covered longer periods of varying lengths; volume XX, currently in preparation, will be the last of the old series and will cover the period of the Six Year Plan. The issuance of the first volume in the new series will precede the production of that extensive record.

The disclosure of current information about the Faith to the public in such a publication was an expectation that won Shoghi Effendi's unstinting support and encouragement. He himself provided much of the material for each volume and supervised its development. His attitude was expressed in a letter dated 12 December 1929 written by his secretary on his behalf and which, describing *The Bahá'í World* as "destined mainly for the non-Bahá'ís," said, "he has tried to attract through its pages the attention of educated and enlightened people and especially leaders in every country, with a view to acquainting them with the broad and fundamental principles of the Faith and to winning their consideration of the Movement as a growing force for good and for peace throughout the entire world. . . . Indeed Shoghi Effendi has made it a point to send copies to as many leading men as possible. . . ." ¹⁷⁰⁻¹

The House of Justice feels that the availability of a well-written, liberally illustrated, attractively designed annual record of Bahá'í activities will facilitate the efforts of the friends and Spiritual Assemblies to present to non-Bahá'ís at all levels of society current information about the Cause in a volume of moderate size. With this in mind, it has assigned the Office of Public Information at the World Center the responsibility for editing and producing *The Bahá'í World* in its new format. In due course, that Office will provide you with detailed information about the series, which is to be produced in both hardcover and high-quality paperback editions, making each volume suitable for presentation to representatives of libraries, educational institutions, government offices, social organizations and the media. ^{170.4}

Besides the proclamation possibilities of *The Bahá'í World*, it will, of course, remain for the friends an important reference source which many will wish to acquire for their personal use. ^{170.5}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

170-1. UD, p. 423.

171

Relative Priority of the Various Bahá'í Funds

31 OCTOBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

171.1 It has come to the attention of the Universal House of Justice that the believers would benefit from a further clarification of the relative priority of the various funds of the Faith, as any confusion in this regard could inhibit the fulfillment of their wish to contribute towards the work of the Cause. It has, therefore, instructed us to send you the following comments, which you are asked to share with the friends under your jurisdiction in ways you feel would be most efficacious.

171.2 The fixing of priorities is dependent on many factors, relating both to the Cause as a whole and to each individual in his or her own circumstances.

171.3 As far as the Cause is concerned, all the work must be kept going; all the funds need to be supported, both directly by the believers, and also by the making of contributions by Bahá'í institutions from one fund to another, which do not take the place of contributions from individuals—the source of the life-blood of the Cause.

171.4 At the level of the individual believer, attention to the needs of the funds of the Faith parallels the principles which govern other multiple loyalties. The first loyalty of a Bahá'í is to the whole of mankind, for the benefit of the part is best achieved through the welfare of the whole. But this widest loyalty does not eliminate the lesser loyalties of love for one's country, for the area in which one lives, or for one's family. They all constitute a network of interdependent and mutually beneficial loyalties. So it is with the individual believer's relationship to the International, Continental, National and Local Funds.

171.5 Although the setting of priorities for contributing is a matter for personal judgment, the individual believer will certainly bear in mind the priorities of the work of the Cause as a whole.

171.6 At the present time the opportunities for the Bahá'í community, and the challenges in front of it in every field of activity and every part of the globe, are great and growing. All must be met to some degree. But the most challenging and urgent is the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects—the

Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the raising of three new structures of the Administrative Center of the Cause. This vast undertaking is an integral part of God's Plan for the development of the Cause. It is an element of the tremendous changes which mankind is undergoing as the end of the twentieth century approaches. Although small compared with most projects of governments and international bodies, it is a major challenge to the Bahá'í community—a challenge, nevertheless, which it is well within our capacity to meet—and the time for completion of these projects is now.

The united efforts of Bahá'ís in every land will yield not only the material 171.7 means to complete the Mount Carmel Projects but will draw down divine confirmations on the work. It is inevitable that in a project of such size, a large portion of the money will have to come from those Bahá'ís who are endowed with wealth, whether this be to a moderate degree or of a considerable magnitude. The US\$74,000,000 called for during the years of the Three Year Plan is a sum that is difficult for many friends to visualize. Some have written to suggest means of making the contribution of this large sum manageable. One suggested the idea of breaking it into units. Thus, to assist in visualizing this sum one can regard it as being a little over eight thousand units of \$9,000 each. Individuals with means can use this as a measure of whether they feel able, with sacrifice, to give one or more units of \$9,000 in this time. Local communities or other groups may wish to set collective goals on such a unit basis. This may be helpful but, of course, contributions of any size will constitute a vital part of the stream of means for the accomplishment of this historic enterprise.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

172

Release of a Compilation on Entry by Troops

9 NOVEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Beloved Friends,

In the message sent last Ridván, we drew the attention of the Bahá'í 172.1 world to the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years immediately ahead. The growing receptivity of the peoples of

the world to Bahá'u'lláh's Message reinforces our conviction that entry by troops will soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith in country after country.

172.2 To assist the National Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends to understand, welcome, initiate and sustain this process, we are enclosing a compilation entitled *Promoting Entry by Troops* and a covering statement prepared by the Research Department.¹⁷²⁻¹ Whoever studies these illuminating passages will perceive that entry by troops is not merely a stage of the progress of the Cause destined to occur in its own good time, dependent on the receptivity of the population as a whole—it is a phenomenon which the Bahá'í communities, by their own activities, can prepare for and help to bring about. It is also a process which, once started, can be sustained. By a wise allocation of resources and the energetic pursuit of simultaneous plans of expansion, deepening and consolidation, the process of entry by troops should bring about a rapidly increasing supply of active believers, soundly based local communities, and steadily evolving local and national Bahá'í institutions.

172.3 The Bahá'í world needs to foster a united clarity of vision for the expansion of the Cause and all its agencies, and a wide range of activities suited to the differing conditions of both the general population and the individual Bahá'ís. We therefore urge the friends, and especially the Assemblies, to study this compilation, to understand the coherence of its statements, and to use its counsels to lend a renewed impetus to the spread of the Faith and the establishment of the institutions of the Cause of God.

172.4 Above all, in every aspect of teaching the Message, the friends should have confidence in the regenerative power of the Word of God, seek strength from the hosts of divine assistance, and anticipate the bounties that will continually be showered upon them. To build a new world is no easy task. The road is stony and filled with obstacles, but the journey is infinitely rewarding.

172.5 It is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the friends throughout the world, with their hearts filled with love for Bahá'u'lláh, will arise to teach His Message to the thirsting multitudes, and will welcome into His Cause all those whose spirits respond to the Divine Summons and who are moved to throw in their lot with the builders of God's Kingdom on this earth.

172-1. The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 3, pp. 154–203.

We are confident that, guided and assisted by the Counselors and their auxiliaries, you will be confirmed in your efforts to direct the energies of the friends towards this momentous undertaking. 172.6

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

173

Formation of Seven New Spiritual Assemblies

26 NOVEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The gathering momentum now evident in the continual teaching successes, notably in lands recently opened to the Faith, impels us to announce that conditions make it ripe for the formation next Riḍván of seven new National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies. 173.1

There will be established in Asia: the National Spiritual Assemblies of Cambodia, with its seat in Phnom Penh; Kazakhstan, with its seat in Alma-Ata; Kyrgyzstan, with its seat in Bishkek; Mongolia, with its seat in Ulaan Baatar; Tajikistan, with its seat in Dushanbe; Uzbekistan, with its seat in Tashkent; and in Europe: the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Slovenia and Croatia, with its seat in Ljubljana. The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia will become the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkmenistan, with its seat in 'Ishqábád. 173.2

With these tidings, we express the urgent hope that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world, encouraged not only by the accretion of new victories but particularly by the opportunities for teaching which multiply daily as a consequence of rampant social disorder, will concentrate their energies on spreading the redemptive Message of Bahá'u'lláh with dispatch and resolve. May they ever draw courage and strength from the manifest confirmations of the Blessed Beauty. 173.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

174

Commencement of Construction of the Center for the Study of the Texts

24 DECEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

174.1 We are delighted to announce that on the afternoon of Sunday 19 December 1993 the Agreement for the General Contract for the construction of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives' Extension was signed, to be followed by immediate nomination of subcontractors for electrical work, plumbing, lifts, air-conditioning and, later, for all finishing works.

174.2 Work has already commenced.

174.3 We supplicate Bahá'u'lláh for confirmation of this historic step.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

175

Appointment of New Continental Counselor

26 DECEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

175.1 For compelling personal reasons, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlshlegel has resigned from the Continental Board of Counselors in Europe after more than five years of highly valued services. We are sure that she will continue to serve the Cause with great devotion in other ways, and assure her and her family of our loving prayers.

175.2 To fill the vacancy thus caused, we announce the appointment of Mrs. Larissa Grigorjevna Tsutskova of Perm, Russia, to the membership of the Continental Board of Counselors in Europe for the remainder of the current term.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

176

Significance of the Building Projects on Mount Carmel

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. 176.1

The projects under way on this mountain are of profound significance. 176.2 They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the expanding needs of the Bahá'í World Center. 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. 176.3 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."¹⁷⁶⁻¹ 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.

176-1. GWB, no. 120.3.

176.4 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."¹⁷⁶⁻² 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.

176.5 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."¹⁷⁶⁻³ 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

176-2. WOB, p. 147; KA, ¶181.

176-3. GPB, p. 213; MBW, p. 84.

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.”¹⁷⁶⁻⁴ 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”¹⁷⁶⁻⁵ 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.”¹⁷⁶⁻⁶

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

176-4. MBW, p. 63.

176-5. TDH, no. 64.6.

176-6. MBW, p. 64.

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.”¹⁷⁶⁻⁷

176.9 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.

176.10 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.

176.11 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.”¹⁷⁶⁻⁸ Now, with the coming of the Lord of Hosts, His devoted servants throughout the world have been summoned to the momentous

176-7. GPB, pp. 315–6.

176-8. Isaiah 2:2 (KJV).

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.”¹⁷⁶⁻⁹

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

177

Reference to the Guardianship in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

II MARCH 1994

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 31 December 1993 was received and referred to us for a ^{177.1} response.

You quote the reference in paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and ask ^{177.2} how this can be understood as an anticipation of the institution of the Guardianship.

As you correctly state, this passage relates entirely to the disposition of ^{177.3} endowments dedicated to charity. In it Bahá'u'lláh provides that the authority in this matter passes, after Him, to the Aghṣán. The Aghṣán comprise not only the sons of Bahá'u'lláh, but all His male descendants. Thus in His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as “the chosen branch,” and provides that if the eldest son of the Guardian did not possess the qualities which would befit him to be appointed as his successor, the Guardian should “choose another branch [Ghuṣn] to succeed him.”¹⁷⁷⁻¹ There is also a letter in which Shoghi Effendi refers to his brother, Ḥusayn, as a “Ghuṣn.”

It should be noted that, although only two of the Aghṣán are explicitly ^{177.4} mentioned in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd (the Ghuṣn-i-A'ẓam and the Ghuṣn-i-Akbar,

176-9. ESW, p. 145.

177-1. WT, pp. 11, 12.

namely ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí), paragraph 42 of the Aqdas refers to more than two. Arabic nouns have three forms for number:

Singular	Branch	<u>G</u> huṣn
Dual	two Branches	<u>G</u> huṣnán
Plural	more than two Branches	A <u>gh</u> ṣán

177.5 The Aqdas foresees a hereditary function for the Aghṣán in relation to the disposition of endowments dedicated to charity. Paragraph 42 of the Aqdas continues by stating that “after them” [i.e. the Aghṣán] this authority passes “to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then.” This envisages the possibility that the line of Aghṣán would come to an end before the Universal House of Justice came into existence, which is, in fact, what happened on the death of Shoghi Effendi.

177.6 In this way, therefore, this passage can be seen as anticipating the institution of the Guardianship. . . .

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

178

Passing of Dorothy Ferraby, Former Continental Counselor

24 MARCH 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Europe

178.1 HEARTS GRIEVED PASSING DEARLY LOVED STALWART MAIDSERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH DOROTHY FERRABY WHOSE DISTINGUISHED SERVICES CAUSE GOD EXTENDED OVER MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY. SHE CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY ADMINISTRATION FAITH AS MEMBER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BRITISH ISLES AND FIRST AUXILIARY BOARD EUROPE, PLAYED VITAL PART HISTORIC AFRICA CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, SERVED WORLD CENTER DURING CUSTODIANSHIP HANDS CAUSE, AND LATER AS MEMBER CONTINENTAL BOARD OF COUNSELORS EUROPE. THESE SERVICES, AS WELL AS HER INDEFATIGABLE LABORS AND STERLING QUALITIES, HER TENACITY, PERSEVERANCE AND UNFLINCHING LOYALTY HAVE ENRICHED ANNALS FAITH BRITISH ISLES AND SET WORTHY EXAMPLE.

178.2 ARDENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HER NOBLE SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS COMMUNITIES UNITED KINGDOM.

REQUESTING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF GERMANY HOLD A MEMORIAL SERVICE MOTHER TEMPLE EUROPE. ALSO ADVISING EUROPEAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES HOLD COMMEMORATIVE GATHERINGS COMMUNITIES THEIR COUNTRIES.

CONVEY OUR LOVING SYMPATHY HER BELOVED DAUGHTER, OTHER MEMBERS 178.3
HER FAMILY.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

179

Murder of Three Iranian Pioneers to South Africa

28 MARCH 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With much sorrow, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to share 179.1
with you certain details relevant to the murder of three Iranian Bahá'í
pioneers to South Africa for the information of the friends throughout the
world.

As you may have learned from the wide publicity which the incident 179.2
received, on 13 March Mr. Houshmand Anvari, Dr. Shamam Bakhshandegi
and Mr. Riaz Razavi were shot to death by gunmen who burst into the
Bahá'í Center at Mdantsane, Ciskei, where some adults and children had
gathered for meetings. Mr. Anvari, who served as caretaker of the Bahá'í
Center, had been painting a portion of the building when four young gun-
men ordered him to go inside at a time when children's classes were ending
and the friends were preparing for a meeting concerning the International
Year of the Family. Mr. Razavi, Auxiliary Board member for Ciskei, and Dr.
Bakhshandegi had been invited especially to consult with the friends at this
meeting. The gunmen ordered the "whites," these three Iranian friends, to
stand apart from the others, lined them up against the wall with their hands
above their heads, searched them, and then fired at them with automatic
weapons as their fellow believers looked on in utter shock. The gunmen fled
immediately, using Mr. Razavi's car to get away. Mr. Razavi and Mr. Anvari
were killed instantly; Dr. Bakhshandegi died upon arrival at a hospital in
Mdantsane.

The three deceased friends lived in South Africa near the border with 179.3
Ciskei and focused their Bahá'í services on that homeland. Mr. Razavi, 44,
director of finance at the University of Fort Hare in Ciskei, pioneered in

1976 to Lesotho where two years later he married Vera Paquay, a Belgian pioneer, and in 1979 was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly. In 1983 the Razavi family moved to King William's Town in South Africa from which in subsequent years Mr. Razavi focused his attention on Ciskei as a Bahá'í teacher and then as an Auxiliary Board member since August 1989. He is survived by his wife, Vera, their 15-year-old son, Jalal, and 12-year-old daughter, Rouhieh.

179.4 Mr. Anvari, 43, a computer programmer, first went to the United States from his native Iran to complete his studies, and in 1990 journeyed with his family to South Africa for the second time, settling in East London in order to serve both in South Africa and Ciskei. He and his wife Dina established a crèche at the Bahá'í Center in Mdantsane and also founded a weekend tutorial school in King William's Town. Mr. Anvari was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of East London and engaged in public relations work for the Faith. He also served as caretaker/manager of the Mdantsane Bahá'í Center where he was killed. He has left behind his wife and their three young children: Vaffa, 8; Nava, 5; and Ava, 2.

179.5 Dr. Bakhshandegi, 28, a dentist, served on the staff of the Cecilia Makwani Hospital in Mdantsane, Ciskei, as supervisor of the community dental section. He was born in Mauritania where his parents were pioneers, and spent his years as a child and youth there, becoming a brilliant student, and eventually attaining proficiency in five languages. In the early 1980s he went as a pioneer to South Africa with his parents, Dr. Amin Bakhshandegi, also a dentist, and Mrs. Badri Bakhshandegi. While a university student in Johannesburg for several years, he was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly. At the end of his studies, he returned to East London, where he served as secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly and as public relations officer for his region. Just before his death Dr. Bakhshandegi had completed the first scientific dental research done in Ciskei for which he will be awarded a master's degree posthumously. He had already won, along with two others, the Elida Ponds Research Award in Dentistry for his work. Dr. Bakhshandegi is survived by his parents and his sister, Djam.

179.6 The killers have not yet been identified nor have their motives been clarified, but the view has been expressed in press reports that their action was racially motivated. The incident evoked condemnatory statements from officials of the South African Government, the African National Congress, and various religious communities. The South African National Spiritual Assembly reported unprecedented publicity of the Faith in their country as

a result. Many of the published reports mention that the Bahá'ís of South Africa have a 40-year history of multiracialism. Stories distributed by the wire services, the Associated Press and Reuters, have appeared in newspapers around the world. Other international media have also carried reports.

On 19 March, a dignified funeral service, attended by some five hundred people, was conducted at the town hall of a suburb of East London called Cambridge. In addition to the Bahá'ís who came from all over southern Africa as well as from many local communities in South Africa, the attendees included the Mayor of East London, the Chancellor and a member of the Council of the University of Fort Hare, two members of the National Party for that region and many other sympathizers from the public. In his eulogy the Mayor of East London regarded these deaths as a sacrifice for peace and the unity of mankind. After several hours of prayers, readings from the Sacred Scriptures, eulogies and expressions of sympathy, the three bodies of these dearly loved and respected friends were taken to the cemetery and finally laid to rest side by side. 179.7

Upon receiving news of this tragic incident from the National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa, the House of Justice responded with the following message on 14 March: 179.8

SHOCKED GRIEVED NEWS VIOLENT DEATH HOUSHMAND ANVARI, SHAMA-MBAKH SHANDEGI AND RIAZ RAZAVI IN CISKEI. PROFOUNDLY IMPRESSED STERLING EXAMPLE SET BY THEIR DEDICATION CAUSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN WHOSE SERVICE THEY WERE DIRECTLY ENGAGED WHEN STRUCK DOWN BY ASSASSINS' BULLETS. DEEPLY SYMPATHIZE IRREPARABLE LOSS THEIR DEAR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS. MAY ALL HEARTS BE COMFORTED BY PROMISE BLESSED BEAUTY THAT THEY THAT HAVE FORSAKEN THEIR COUNTRY IN PATH GOD AND SUBSEQUENTLY ASCENDED UNTO HIS PRESENCE SHALL BE BLESSED BY CONCOURSE ON HIGH AND THEIR NAMES RECORDED BY PEN GLORY AMONG SUCH AS HAVE LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES AS MARTYRS PATH GOD. CONFIDENT JOYOUS WELCOME ABHÁ KINGDOM THESE DISTINGUISHED SOULS. ARDENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES THEIR PROGRESS DIVINE WORLDS. ALSO OFFERING SUPPLICATIONS BEHALF ALL RELATIVES FRIENDS. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA. 179.8a

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

180

Appointment of New Continental Counselor

7 APRIL 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

180.1 After more than four years of highly valued service on the Continental Board of Counselors in Africa, Mr. Gilbert Robert has resigned for compelling health reasons. We are confident that he will continue to serve the Cause with great devotion in other ways, and assure him of our loving prayers.

180.2 To fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Robert's resignation, we announce the appointment of Mr. Eddy Lutchmaya of Quatre-Bornes, Mauritius, to the membership of the Continental Board of Counselors in Africa for the remainder of the current term.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

181

Riḍván Message 1994

RIḌVÁN 151

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

181.1 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.

181.2 At the World Center, the 23rd of May saw the opening of a new five-year term of the membership of the International Teaching Center. 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. 181.3

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. 181.4

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 181.5

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.

181.6 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.

181.7 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.

181.8 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."¹⁸¹⁻¹ When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings, develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens

181-1. PEPT, p. 3.

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 ^{181.9} 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.¹⁸¹⁻² 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, ^{181.10} 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 Rúhíyyih Khánum undertook an arduous journey for the encouragement of the believers and the proclamation of the Faith, covering Russia and other lands which were formerly parts of the Soviet Union, from the Baltic States in the west to Siberia in the east, from the Central Asian republics in the south to Saint Petersburg and Yakutsk in the north.

This Riḍván seven inaugural National Conventions will be held. ^{181.11} Our representatives at these historic events will be the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih 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

181-2. See no. 173, p. 367; and CC 3, pp. 154–203.

the Cause ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá for the election of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Slovenia and Croatia in Ljubljana; Counselor Laretta 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.

^{181.12} 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

182

Achievements of Bahá’í Youth in Europe

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,

^{182.1} 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 182.2 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 182.3 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.”¹⁸²⁻¹

You have come together from lands which are troubled by many different 182.4 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 182.5 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 182.6 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

182-1. *GWB*, no. 70.1.

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.

182.7 May the Hosts of the Supreme Concurrence rush to your aid, and may Bahá'u'lláh bless and guide every step you take for the advancement of His Cause.

182.8 We shall remember you all in our prayers in the Holy Shrines.
With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

183

Response to Concerns Raised by the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly

19 MAY 1994

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

183.1 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.

183.2 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.

* * *

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. 183.3

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.”¹⁸³⁻¹ 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. 183.4

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 de- 183.5

183-1. ADJ, ¶78.

gree 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.

183.6 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.¹⁸³⁻²

183.7 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."¹⁸³⁻³

183-2. ADJ, ¶27, 28.

183-3. ADJ, ¶71.

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.”¹⁸³⁻⁴ 183.8

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.”¹⁸³⁻⁵ 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. 183.9

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 183.10

183-4. ADJ, ¶101.

183-5. ADJ, ¶102.

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,"¹⁸³⁻⁶ 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.

^{183.11} 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."¹⁸³⁻⁷ 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.

183-6. ADJ, ¶15.

183-7. The latter two letters can be found in CF, pp. 4–37 and 122–32, respectively.

* * *

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. 183.12

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. 183.13

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. 183.14

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 183.15

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.”¹⁸³⁻⁸

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.

^{183.16} 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.

^{183.17} 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.

^{183.18} 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.

183-8. WT, p. 13.

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. 183.19

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. 183.20

183.21 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.”¹⁸³⁻⁹ 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.

183.22 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.”¹⁸³⁻¹⁰ 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.

183.23 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.”¹⁸³⁻¹¹

183-9. MUHJ, no. 111.14.

183-10. DG, p. 50.

183-11. TB, p. 138.

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. 183.24

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.¹⁸³⁻¹² 183.25

* * *

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. 183.26

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 183.27

183-12. See MUHJ, no. 72.

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.

183.28 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.

183.29 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.”¹⁸³⁻¹³

183-13. BA, pp. 45, 46.

Unity within the Assembly itself is, of course, of immediate importance 183.30
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 183.31
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 183.32
goal of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, implies, as Shoghi Effendi said, an “organic change in the structure of present-day society.”¹⁸³⁻¹⁴ 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:

183-14. WOB, p. 43.

183.32a

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.¹⁸³⁻¹⁵

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."¹⁸³⁻¹⁶

183.33

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.

183.34

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

183-15. LG, no. 277.

183-16. LG, no. 1344.

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. 183.35

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 183.36

incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

183.37 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.

183.38 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."¹⁸³⁻¹⁷

183.39 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:

183.39a 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

183-17. LGA, p. 9.

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.¹⁸³⁻¹⁸

183.39b

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

183.40

183-18. BA, pp. 63–64.

to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates.”¹⁸³⁻¹⁹

183.41 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.

183.42 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.

183.43 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

183-19. BA, p. 79.

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.”¹⁸³⁻²⁰

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

183-20. LG, no. 119.

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.

183.47 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.

183.48 A further decentralization of the national administration would increase the possibility of loosening control at the top and encouraging the involve-

ment 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.

* * *

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. 183.49

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 183.50

its members not once again blaze a trail that can set in motion a myriad victories?

183.51 Our ardent petition at the Holy Threshold is that the response of the champion-builders of the New World Order will be immediate, whole-hearted and abundantly confirmed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

184

Availability of Electronic Versions of Sacred Writings

31 MAY 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

184.1 On 7 April 1994, it was announced to various computer user groups that electronic versions of a number of the Sacred Writings were available for downloading from a computer at the Bahá'í World Center.

184.2 Within the first three days of operation, over one thousand copies of the books in electronic format were transferred to computers around the world.

184.3 The system being used is known as FTP (File Transfer Protocol). It allows those with the appropriate programs on their own computers to connect via the Internet directly to the FTP Server at the Bahá'í World Center. They can then see a list of the Bahá'í books available electronically from the World Center, and copy them into their own computers.

184.4 The text files have been reduced to their simplest form (known as ASCII, an international standard format recognized by most computers), then "compressed" to save computer space and transmission time. When copied to another computer they are uncompressed and become basic, readable files. Other computer programs owned by the users can then be used to conduct word searches and similar functions on the text. . . .

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

185

Responsibility of Delegates to a National Convention

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 ^{185.1} 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 ^{185.2} 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 ^{185.3} 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 ^{185.4} 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 ^{185.4a} Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really ap-

plicable 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.¹⁸⁵⁻¹

185.5 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.

185.6 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

186

Visit to the Bahá'í World Center by the President of the Seychelles

26 JULY 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

186.1 We take great pleasure in sharing the news of the visit to the Bahá'í World Center on 22 and 23 July of His Excellency France Albert René, President of the Republic of the Seychelles. President René was welcomed by the

185-1. UD, p. 207.

members of the Universal House of Justice for consultations in the Council Chamber. These discussions, which he had requested, lasted just under two hours and dealt both with issues affecting global peace and important development challenges facing the Seychelles. They were marked by a spirit of candor and great cordiality.

Highly gratifying, too, was the presence at the World Center of His Excellency's wife, Sarah, their young daughter, Ella, and Mrs. René's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Abdul Rahman Zarqani. The First Lady and her parents are Bahá'ís, and Mr. Zarqani is a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for the Seychelles islands. 186.2

During the course of the two days spent at the World Center, the presidential party was able to visit the Shrines of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as well as several other Bahá'í Holy Places. On the first evening, a formal dinner was offered in His Excellency's honor in the Banquet Hall of the Seat of the House of Justice. In addition to our guests, who included the Mayor of Haifa and his wife, the dinner was graced by the presence of the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan. On this occasion, as throughout the visit, President René expressed a lively appreciation of the relevance of the Bahá'í Teachings and of the contribution that the Seychellois Bahá'í community is making to his country. 186.3

This historic event brings perceptibly closer that future age envisioned by Shoghi Effendi when "embodiments of kingly power" from every part of the world will eagerly visit the World Center of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. 186.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

187

Improving Our Understanding of the Cause of God

1 AUGUST 1994

To an individual Bahá'í

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. . . . 187.1

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 187.2

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.

1873 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."¹⁸⁷⁻¹

1874 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."¹⁸⁷⁻² He also admonishes us:

187-1. HW, Persian, no. 9.

187-2. GWB, no. 159.3.

1874a
 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.¹⁸⁷⁻³

1875
 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.

1876
 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.

1877
 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

187-3. *GWB*, no. 120.1.

188

Message to the World Forestry Charter Gathering

7 AUGUST 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{188.1} We take pleasure in sharing with you news of the highly successful World Forestry Charter Gathering held at St. James's Palace, Thursday, 28 July, in the presence of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and H.R.H. The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who were the two principal speakers. Amatu'l-Bahá's brief and radiant address on the spiritual dimensions of the environmental challenge, which cited words of Bahá'u'lláh as the inspiration for her own devotion to the environmental cause, was several times interrupted by the warm applause of her listeners. For his part, Prince Philip used the occasion to issue an urgent call for a legally binding international convention to halt reckless deforestation of the planet.

^{188.2} Among the more than two hundred distinguished guests at the luncheon and the reception that followed were ambassadors and other diplomats, representatives of major environmental protection organizations, and prominent personalities in government, business and the professions. The government of the United Kingdom participated through a statement from Prime Minister John Major, read by the Secretary of State for Environmental Affairs. Messages of support and encouragement were received from seventeen governments, the one from President Bill Clinton of the United States capturing succinctly the vision that animated the gathering, that, in the protection and sustainable management of the earth's forests, there are no borders.

^{188.3} The idea of regular gatherings to focus government and media attention on preservation of the world's forests was begun in 1945 by Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker, a well-known member of the Bahá'í Faith and an internationally renowned pioneer in the field of ecology. The tradition was revived on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1989 by the Bahá'í International Community acting in collaboration with the International Tree Foundation (formerly "Men of the Trees"), the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the United Nations Environment Program, and Dr. Baker's literary executor, Mr. Hugh Locke.

Bahá'í leadership in the initiative won generous praise in the address ^{188.4} given to this year's gathering by His Royal Highness and in several messages from heads of state and government.

You are welcome to share this information with the friends in your ^{188.5} community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

189

Progress of the Mount Carmel Project Fund

12 SEPTEMBER 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you of the progress ^{189.1} being made towards raising the US\$74,000,000 called for in contributions to the Mount Carmel Projects.

During the first year of the Three Year Plan, as a result of the self- ^{189.2} sacrificing efforts of the friends throughout the world, a total of almost sixteen million dollars was contributed to the Arc Projects Fund, equivalent to nearly 1,800 units of nine thousand dollars each. During the course of the year the volume of contributions grew at a progressively increasing rate, showing the friends' eager response to the letter of 31 October 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice in which mention was made of units of \$9,000.

A total of over \$7,500,000 was contributed during the three months ^{189.3} of February through April 1994. If the friends can maintain this level of devoted sacrifice during the remaining two years of the Plan, they will triumphantly raise the fifty-eight million dollars which remain to be provided to meet the goal.

The rate of contributions dropped considerably in the months of May ^{189.4} and June, to only just over 40% of the needed monthly average. However, the early months of an administrative year often show a lower level of contributions, and it is the ardent prayer of the Universal House of Justice that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land will keep the high importance and urgency of this great undertaking always in their thoughts and prayers,

and will exert every effort to ensure that the goal is met and there will be no cause for a halt in the work.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

190

Increasing Urgency of the Goals of the Three Year Plan

20 OCTOBER 1994

To the Bahá'ís of the World

^{190.1} At this midpoint in the Three Year Plan, we feel moved to offer thanksgiving to Bahá'u'lláh on behalf of His followers in every land for the abundant, unfailing signs of His life-giving confirmations. We rejoice particularly at the significant response to the call for pioneers and traveling teachers and are heartened by the sacrificial outpourings in support of the majestic projects on the Mountain of the Lord.

^{190.2} The time now remaining is short indeed. Swift, concentrated action is imperative if crucial national goals are to be achieved in fulfillment of the vital overall objectives of the Plan. We especially appeal to our fellow Bahá'ís everywhere to mount a mightier effort than ever before in offering the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to increasing numbers of their compatriots, and in inviting them to investigate and embrace His Cause. Growing suffering and turmoil of humankind call for a commensurate acceleration in the operation of the healing and unifying energies of God's holy Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

191

Formation of Five New National Spiritual Assemblies

7 DECEMBER 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{191.1} With joyful hearts we announce the formation next Riḍván of five new National Spiritual Assemblies. One will be in Africa: Eritrea with its seat in Asmara; two in Asia: Armenia with its seat in Yerevan and Georgia with its

seat in Tbilisi; and two in Europe: Belarus with its seat in Minsk and Sicily with its seat in Palermo.

The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia and Armenia will then become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Russian Federation, and the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova will become the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Ukraine and Moldova. 191.2

Moreover, a simultaneous occurrence will be the merging of the Bahá'í communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa and Transkei under the one National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South Africa, to reflect the recent political reunion of that region. 191.3

These thrilling prospects denote the quickening pace of the consolidation process in different parts of the world, making possible a further thrust in the evolution of the wondrous System originated by the Lord of the Age for ordering the affairs and ultimately guaranteeing the peace of the entire planet. In their contemplation of such impending victories, may the friends everywhere derive fresh encouragement to increase and accelerate their manifold efforts in spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in all regions. 191.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

192

Questions regarding Translation of Sacred Writings

15 DECEMBER 1994

To an individual Bahá'í

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. 192.1

192.2 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

192.2a . . . 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.¹⁹²⁻¹

192.3 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 Center 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

192-1. KA, p. i.

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.”¹⁹²⁻²

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.¹⁹²⁻³

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 Center should be considered as partaking in the infallibility of the Universal

192-2. KA, p. 10.

192-3. TB, p. 68.

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.

192.8 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

193

Progress of Mount Carmel Projects

30 DECEMBER 1994

To the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every land

193.1 CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED FOR MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS SINCE LAUNCHING THREE YEAR PLAN NOW TOTAL SOME TWENTY-SIX MILLION DOLLARS. FORTY-EIGHT MILLION REMAIN TO BE RAISED TO MEET GOAL OF SEVENTY-FOUR MILLION DOLLARS BY RIDVÁN 1996.

193.2 IMMENSE ENTERPRISE GATHERING MOMENTUM; CONSTRUCTION INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER COMMENCED; CENTER FOR STUDY OF TEXTS PROGRESSING WITH FULL FORCE, RISING IN CERTAIN AREAS BEYOND FOURTH LEVEL; TERRACE IMMEDIATELY BELOW SHRINE ALREADY GIVES PREVIEW BEAUTY FINAL COMPLETION; WORK OTHER LOWER TERRACES ADVANCING RAPIDLY AMIDST EXPANSE OF GREEN; UPPER TERRACES TAKING SHAPE ON STEEP SLOPES ABOVE SHRINE. ENTIRE PROJECT STANDS IN URGENT NEED INCREASED SUPPORT THROUGH MIGHTY SELF-SACRIFICING EFFORT DURING REMAINING MONTHS THREE YEAR PLAN.

193.3 ARDENTLY PRAYING SACRED THRESHOLD WORLDWIDE RESPONSE THIS CHALLENGING JUNCTURE RAISING ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER GOD’S HOLY FAITH.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

194

Release of *The Prosperity of Humankind*

23 JANUARY 1995

To the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís throughout the world
Dear Friends,

As the twentieth century rapidly approaches its end, there is a marked ^{194.1} acceleration in the efforts of governments and peoples to reach common understandings on issues affecting the future of humankind. The 1992 Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the forthcoming March 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, to be followed in September by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, are conspicuous indications of this acceleration. These events are as capstones to the myriad activities taking place in different parts of the world involving a wide range of nongovernmental organizations and networks in an urgent search for values, ideas and practical measures that can advance prospects for the peaceful development of all peoples. In this endeavor can be discerned the gathering momentum of an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings, the realization of which our sacred scriptures describe as one of the lights of unity that will illumine the path to peace. The Bahá'ís around the world are, of course, heartened by such hopeful trends and will continue increasingly to lend moral and practical support to them as opportunities allow.

In view of the intensive attention being given to the issues of social and ^{194.2} economic development since the Earth Summit in Brazil, we requested the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information to prepare a statement on the concept of global prosperity in the context of the Bahá'í Teachings. This statement is now ready for distribution. We are therefore very pleased to send each of you herewith a copy of *The Prosperity of Humankind* and to commend it to your use as you pursue activities that enable you to interact with governments, organizations, and people everywhere.¹⁹⁴⁻¹

194-1. The statement is available online at <http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0303.htm>.

Our confident hope is that the statement will assist you to foster understanding of this important topic among the members of your communities and thus vitalize their contribution to the constructive social processes at work throughout the planet.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

195

Release of a Compilation on Scholarship

10 FEBRUARY 1995

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{195.1} We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to send you the enclosed copy of a compilation on scholarship prepared recently at its request by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center.¹⁹⁵⁻¹

^{195.2} It is the hope of the House of Justice that a study of this compilation will serve as a stimulus and a guide in the further development of Bahá'í scholarship, and that the unique features of this vital aspect of Bahá'í activity will be clarified through a perusal of its contents.

^{195.3} The House of Justice calls upon the members of the community of the Greatest Name, young and old, men and women alike, to strive to develop and offer to humanity a new model of scholarly activity along the lines set out in this compilation, animated by the spirit of inquiry into the limitless meaning of the Divine Teachings. This scholarly endeavor should be characterized by the welcome it offers to all who wish to be involved in it, each in his or her own way, by mutual encouragement and cooperation among its participants, and by the respect accorded to distinguished accomplishment and outstanding achievement. The spirit and approach should be far removed from the arrogance, contention, and exclusiveness which have too often sullied the name of scholarship in the wider society, and which have created barriers to the sound development of this worthy pursuit.

195-1. The compilation is too long to include here; see CC 3, pp. 226–64; the compilation is also available online at <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/SCH/>.

It is left to your discretion to determine the use you should make of the enclosed material. 195.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

196

Cultivating a Proper Attitude toward Bahá'í Elections

14 MARCH 1995

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 8 February 1995 and we have been asked to respond as follows. 196.1

The House of Justice does not feel that you should be inhibited from carrying out the functions specified for the National Spiritual Assembly at the National Convention through fear of being accused of electioneering. Through the performance of these assigned functions to the best of your ability, you will be able to find the appropriate balance between, on the one hand, an excessive prominence of the outgoing members, which could arouse concerns among delegates, and, on other hand, such disengagement from the Convention consultation and from presentation of National Assembly concerns and plans that the delegates could feel deprived of an important component in their deliberations. 196.2

Electioneering is principally a matter of attitude rather than of the extent of exposure of a believer indulging in such a deplorable form of conduct. As the believers grow in their powers of discernment, they can more accurately come to their own private conclusions about any Bahá'í who appears to be seeking to put himself forth in a desire to be elected to an administrative position. It should also be understood that, at this stage in the development of the Bahá'í community, it is not unusual for Assembly members to be subject to unwarranted accusations of electioneering from believers who may have a distorted impression of what a National Spiritual Assembly should do in the discharge of its functions; this should not cause you undue concern, and should not detain you from conscientiously taking those actions which you believe to be in the best interests of the Cause. 196.3

You are no doubt familiar with the statement of the Guardian, in referring to the duties of members of a National Spiritual Assembly, that 196.4

^{196.4a} 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.¹⁹⁶⁻¹

^{196.5} The National Convention is the only occasion at which believers from distant areas, such as . . . to which you refer in your letter, can have informal fellowship with the members of both outgoing and incoming National Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provides a unique opportunity to reassure them about the attitudes of their elected representatives and overcome the sense of separation to which you refer.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

197

Tenth Anniversary of Universidad Núr

19 MARCH 1995

To an individual Bahá'í

^{197.1} The Universal House of Justice understands that you will be attending the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Universidad Núr, an institution which has been so dear to you over the course of those many years. It would be appreciated if you would convey the following on behalf of the House of Justice to the friends gathered on that occasion.

^{197.2} The Universal House of Justice is moved to convey its warm congratulations to the many friends associated with Universidad Núr for the notable achievements that institution has made since it opened its doors ten years ago—for the rapidity with which it has progressed, for its close adherence to the principles of the Faith, for its constant effort to apply the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to human affairs, for the cordial relations it has developed with government authorities at various levels, and for the manner in which it has time and again placed itself at the disposal of the National Spiritual As-

196-1. BA, p. 64.

sembly to help promote the interests of the Faith in whatever way it deemed necessary. All of this clearly could not have been achieved without the self-abnegation and sacrificial efforts of many firm and devoted believers. The Universal House of Justice will pray for each and every one of them that, through their endeavors, Universidad Núr will continue to go from strength to strength and add fresh luster to the annals of the Bahá'í community of Bolivia.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

198

Preparations for Completion of Lower Terraces on Mount Carmel

4 APRIL 1995

To All National Spiritual Assemblies

We rejoice at the opportunity to announce a major advance in the Mount Carmel Projects marked by the razing of several houses, thus opening the way for the completion of the lower terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. These are the same structures to which Shoghi Effendi referred in a cable on 1 October 1954 to the Bahá'í world stating that “preliminary documents have been signed in connection with the purchase from the Development Authority of the State of Israel of five houses, situated at the foot of Mount Carmel and adjoining the last terrace of the Báb’s Shrine. . . .”¹⁹⁸⁻¹ Subsequently, in March 1955, he confirmed the acquisition of these houses by the Bahá'í World Center. 198.1

The action just taken with the full cooperation of the city authorities harmonizes with the intention of the beloved Guardian: it clears the site for the monumental entrance to the majestic path leading from the southern end of Ben Gurion Avenue up to the central edifice of the Shrine and beyond to the crest of God’s Holy Mountain. This progress in the construction work is complemented by yet another welcome development, namely, a municipal scheme involving restoration of the German Templar houses along that avenue and a general beautification of the area—a scheme that 198.2

198-1. MBW, p. 71.

will ensure an uninterrupted vista of splendor northward from the Terraces to the sea, towards Bahjí.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

199
**Response of Bahá'í Community
to Believer Suffering from AIDS**

17 APRIL 1995

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{199.1} Your letter of 10 January 1995 to the Universal House of Justice was received by fax only on 14 February. It has asked us to convey to you that it was deeply saddened to learn that a member of your Bahá'í community has been diagnosed as being infected with the AIDS virus. If it will not be distressing to this friend to know that the news has been shared with the House of Justice, then you are asked to kindly extend to him (or her) its loving sympathy, and the assurance of its fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold, beseeching Bahá'u'lláh to shower this servant of the Cause with His tender mercies and protection.

^{199.2} You ask if there is any guidance on this matter. It is not clear from your letter whether the situation of this believer is commonly known in the Bahá'í community. If it is, then the House of Justice hopes you will encourage the Local Spiritual Assembly involved, and the friends in the community, to turn to non-Bahá'í agencies specializing in dealing with AIDS for information and counseling as appropriate or needed. Furthermore, all should draw inspiration and guidance from the peerless example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose compassion, loving understanding and sincere concern for the welfare of others exemplified the Bahá'í attitude to those who are suffering. . . .

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

200

Riḍván Message 1995

RIDVÁN 152

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Season of seasons, we greet you with profound pleasure at the ^{200.1} 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 ^{200.2} 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 ^{200.3} 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.

200.4 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.

200.5 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.

200.6 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.

200.7 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."²⁰⁰⁻¹ It is a vision which, given the state of the world, compels the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects as scheduled. ^{200.8}

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 ^{200.9}

200-1. MBW, p. 74.

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.

200.10 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 Rúhíyyih Khánum, 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.

200.11 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.

200.12 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."²⁰⁰⁻² And at this extraordinary moment in the history of the

200-2. *GWB*, nos. 129.3, 128.10.

planet, nothing whatever is of more critical importance than inviting people of every sort and every gift to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts.

As we send you this message, clearly before us is a vision of untold victories waiting to be seized. We are certain you can realize a myriad of these in the remaining time of the Three Year Plan. Just such an accomplishment must earnestly be striven for, so as to set the stage for the next global enterprise to be launched at Ridván 1996. There shall be mobilized then a world-embracing campaign to ensure a befitting crescendo to the achievements of a century regarded by no less than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself as a period that will have “left traces which shall last forever.”²⁰⁰⁻³ 200.13

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

201 Separation of Church and State

27 APRIL 1995

To an individual Bahá’í
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. 201.1

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: 201.2

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 201.2a

200-3. PUP, p. 174.

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.

201.3 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.”

201.4 The complete paragraph in which the words appear is as follows:

201.4a In the light of these words,²⁰¹⁻¹ 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.

201-1. Reference to a letter of 15 June 1935 from Shoghi Effendi, published in the United States *Bahá'í News*, no. 95, October 1935, p. 2, and in *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, 1932–1946* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp. 4–5. The referenced text can also be found in TDH, no. 16.

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: ^{201.5}

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.²⁰¹⁻² ^{201.5a}

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.²⁰¹⁻³ ^{201.6}

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: ^{201.7}

201-2. WOB, p. 66.

201-3. BA, p. 147.

- 201.7a 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)
- 201.7b 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)
- 201.7c 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)
- 201.8 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.
- 201.9 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:
- 201.9a 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! 201.9b

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. 201.10

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'is in America on 23 February 1924: 201.11

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 201.11a

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?

201.11b

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.²⁰¹⁻⁴

201.12

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

201-4. BA, p. 62.

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.²⁰¹⁻⁵

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.²⁰¹⁻⁶

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.

201-5. WT, pp. 14–15.

201-6. LG, no. 1604.

- 201.15a 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.²⁰¹⁻⁷
- 201.16 In relation to other international institutions, the Guardian has given the following guidance:
- 201.16a 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.²⁰¹⁻⁸
- 201.17 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:
- 201.17a 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.²⁰¹⁻⁹
- 201.18 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

201-7. WOB, p. 203.

201-8. BA, p. 47.

201-9. WOB, pp. 6-7.

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.²⁰¹⁻¹⁰

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”²⁰¹⁻¹¹ of the divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly

201-10. WOB, pp. 64–65.

201-11. CF, p. 5.

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:

- 201.20a 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.²⁰¹⁻¹²
- 201.21 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:
- 201.21a 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

201-12. WOB, p. 10.

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.²⁰¹⁻¹³

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:

201-13. MBW, p. 155.

- 201.24a 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.²⁰¹⁻¹⁴
- 201.25 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:
- 201.25a . . . 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.
- 201.26 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":
- 201.26a 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,

201-14. ADJ, ¶52.

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.²⁰¹⁻¹⁵

Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve ^{201.27} 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 ^{201.28} 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 ^{201.29} 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

201-15. WOB, p. 152.

202

Ruling of Supreme Court in India Citing the Bahá'í Teachings as a Guideline for Resolving Disputes

5 MAY 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

202.1 The Universal House of Justice was overjoyed to receive recently a copy of a judgment by the Supreme Court of India on a religious dispute between the Hindus and Muslims in which the official decision of this highest judicial authority in India cited the Bahá'í Faith as an example and the Teachings of the Faith as guidelines for solving such disputes. As you may recall, the Babri mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya was razed by a group of Hindus because the mosque, built in 1528, had been erected on the spot where the Hindu god Rama is said to have been born thousands of years earlier. The destruction enraged Muslims and ignited a grave crisis in India. Muslim and Hindu mobs attacked each other's houses of worship, homes and people in a number of cities, resulting in the death of hundreds and the destruction of property not only in India but in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and even in Britain.

202.2 The relevant excerpt from the judgment of the Supreme Court of India dated 24 October 1994 is enclosed for your information.

202.3 The Faith has emerged from obscurity, thanks to the sacrifices of the Bahá'ís in Iran and the solidarity of the Bahá'í world in rallying around its institutions to support and protect the community of the Greatest Name in the cradle of the Faith. Many doors have been opened as a result of campaigns waged to reach government officials to familiarize them with the Faith and the deplorable situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran, as well as through the interaction of the friends in worthy causes for the benefit of their countrymen. Reports have been received that receptive members of governments are now using the life-giving Teachings and principles of the Faith in directing the affairs of their countries. The enclosed excerpt from the judgment is one such indication. The House of Justice is gratified by these accomplishments, and is confident that such efforts will be magnified in the future.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

The Supreme Court of India
Civil Original Jurisdiction
Transferred Case (C) Numbers 41, 43 And 45 Of 1993
Writ Petition (Civil) Number 20b Of 1993
Transferred Case (C) Number 42 Of 1993
Writ Petition (C) Number 186 Of 1994
Excerpt from pp. 91–93 of the Judgment of the
Supreme Court of India

“As 1993 began, communal violence returned to India, sparked by ^{202.4} the Controversy over a 16th century mosque said to stand on the ruins of an ancient Hindu temple honoring Lord Rama.” It may be said that ‘fundamentalism and pluralism pose the two challenges that people of all religious traditions face’; and “to the fundamentalists, the borders of religious certainty are tightly guarded; to the pluralist, the borders are good fences where one meets the neighbor. To many fundamentalists, secularism, seen as the denial of religious claims, is the enemy; to pluralists, secularism, seen as the separation of government from the domination of a single religion, is the essential concomitant of religious diversity and the protection of religious freedom.” The present state may be summarized thus: “At present, the greatest religious tensions are not those between any one religion and another; they are the tensions between the fundamentalist and the pluralist in each and every religious tradition.” The spirit of universalism popular in the late 19th century was depicted by Max Muller who said, “The living kernel of religion can be found, I believe, in almost every creed, however much the husk may vary. And think what that means: It means that above and beneath and behind religions there is one eternal, one universal religion.”

The year 1993 has been described as the “Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation.” ^{202.5} Is that century old spirit of conciliation and cooperation reflected in reactions of the protagonists of different religious faiths to justify 1993 being called the “Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation?” (“Reflections on Religious Diversity” by Diana L. [illegible] September 1994). It is this hope which has to be realized in the future.

A neutral perception of the requirement for communal harmony is to be ^{202.6} found in the Bahá’í faith. In a booklet, *Communal Harmony: India’s Greatest Challenge*, forming part of the Bahá’í literature, it is stated thus:

- 202.6a “ . . . The spirit of tolerance and assimilation are the hall marks of this civilization. Never has the question of communal harmony and social integration raised such a wide range of emotions as today. . . .”
- 202.6b “Fear, suspicion and hatred are the fuel which feed the flame of communal disharmony and conflict. Though the Indian masses would prefer harmony between various communities, it cannot be established through the accommodation ‘separate but equal,’ nor through the submergence of minority culture into majority culture—whatever that may be. . . .”
- 202.6c “Lasting harmony between heterogeneous communities can only come through a recognition of the oneness of mankind, a realization that differences that divide us along ethnic and religious lines have no foundation. Just as there are no boundaries drawn on the earth of separate nations, distinctions of social, economic, ethnic and religious identity imposed by peoples are artificial; they have only benefited those with vested interests. On the other hand, naturally occurring diverse regions of the planet, or the country, such as mountain and plains, each have unique benefits. The diversity created by God has infinite value, while distinctions imposed by man have no substance.”
- 202.7 We conclude with the fervent hope that communal harmony, peace and tranquility would soon descend in the land of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, whose favorite *bhajan* (hymn) was
- [two lines written in Hindi]
- 202.7a “Ishwar and Allah are both your names,
Oh God! Grant this wisdom to all.”
- 202.8 We do hope that the people of India would remember the gospel he preached and practiced, and live up to his ideals. “Better late than never.” . . .
- [Justice] J.S. Verma
[Justice] G.N. Ray
New Delhi
October 24, 1994

203

The Character of Internet Postings

19 MAY 1995

To an individual Bahá'í

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. ^{203.1}

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. ^{203.2}

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.”²⁰³⁻¹ ^{203.3}

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 ^{203.4}

203-1. WOB, p. 203.

worthwhile intellectual endeavor, as has so conspicuously been the case with societies of the past.

203.5 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:

203.5a 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.²⁰³⁻²

203.6 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

203-2. *GWB*, no. 84.4.

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. 203.7

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. 203.8

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

204

Emergency Contributions to Mount Carmel Project Funds

20 JUNE 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

An emergency mission undertaken at our request by one of our members, accompanied by a member of the International Teaching Center and the Chief Financial Officer of the Bahá'í World Center, who visited the United States, Canada, and Europe and apprised the friends of the possible crisis that could affect the progress of the Mount Carmel Projects if the shortfall of US\$40 million was not contributed by the end of the Three Year Plan, has just been completed. With deep satisfaction we are glad to announce that the total sum has been ensured through immediate contributions, firm pledges, and donations in kind, enabling this vital enterprise, which is progressing at full force, to proceed without any need to interrupt the construction work. Heartfelt acknowledgement is due to all those from the areas visited and elsewhere who heroically stepped forward and made sacrificial offerings for the furtherance of this vast undertaking so highly extolled by the beloved Guardian. 204.1

204.2 From the conclusion of the Three Year Plan, approximately US\$10 million annually will still be required until the end of the century, when the projects underway on Mount Carmel are expected to be completed.

204.3 If all pledges are duly honored, as anticipated, and more friends in the above-named areas, as well as the rest of the world, will continue to offer their loving contributions towards this historic undertaking during this last year of the Three Year Plan, the estimated amount of US\$10 million of annual contributions mentioned above will correspondingly be reduced, enabling the World Center to direct its attention with less anxiety to the vital needs of the expansion, consolidation, and proclamation work of the Faith throughout all continents.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

205

Homosexuality and the Bahá'í Faith

II SEPTEMBER 1995

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

205.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letters . . . in which you describe the impact of the changing sexual mores and the public debate on homosexuality on some of the members of the American Bahá'í community who are homosexuals. We are instructed to provide the following guidance in response to the National Spiritual Assembly's requests for a clarification of the Bahá'í law on homosexual practices and for assistance in guiding the believers.

205.2 It is important to understand that there is a difference between the Bahá'í attitude towards, on the one hand, the condition of homosexuality and those who are affected by it and, on the other, the practice of homosexual relations by members of the Bahá'í community.

205.3 As you know, the Bahá'í Faith strongly condemns all blatant acts of immorality, and it includes among them the expression of sexual love between individuals of the same sex. With regard to homosexual practices, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 107, and Questions and Answers, number 49, forbids pederasty and sodomy. The following extract from one of His Tablets reveals the strength of His condemnation:

Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond them this ever-proclaiming, truthful and trustworthy Tongue.²⁰⁵⁻¹ 205.3a

In a letter dated 26 March 1950, written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi, the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í Teachings, further explicates the Bahá'í attitude towards homosexuality. It should be noted that the Guardian's interpretation of this subject is based on his infallible understanding of the Texts. It represents both a statement of moral principle and unerring guidance to Bahá'ís who are homosexuals. The letter states: 205.4

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature. 205.4a

To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap.²⁰⁵⁻² 205.4b

It is evident, therefore, that the prohibition against Bahá'ís' engaging in homosexual behavior is an explicit Teaching of the Cause. The Universal House of Justice is authorized to change or repeal its own legislation as conditions change, thus providing Bahá'í law with an essential element of flexibility, but it cannot abrogate or change any of the laws which are explicitly laid down in the sacred Texts. It follows, then, that the House of Justice has no authority to change this clear teaching on homosexual practice. 205.5

205-1. CC 1:148.

205-2. LG, no. 1223.

205.6 You mention that concern has been expressed by some of the friends that the unique identity of homosexual Bahá'ís is not sufficiently appreciated by the Bahá'í community. It is important to reflect on the fact that the Writings of the Faith not only acknowledge that each individual has a God-given identity, but they also set out the means by which this identity can achieve its highest development and fulfillment. Bahá'u'lláh attests that through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God “every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá observes that should man’s “natural qualities . . . be used and displayed in an unlawful way, they become blameworthy.”²⁰⁵⁻³ Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 25 May 1936, written on his behalf, identifies man’s “true self” with “his soul.” In describing the nature of “man’s inner spiritual self or reality,” he notes that the “two tendencies for good or evil are but manifestations of a single reality or self,” and that the self “is capable of development in either way.” Underlining the importance of education to the actualization of man’s potential, the Guardian concludes:

205.6a All depends fundamentally on the training or education which man receives. Human nature is made up of possibilities both for good and evil. True religion can enable it to soar in the highest realm of the spirit, while its absence can, as we already witness around us, cause it to fall to the lowest depths of degradation and misery.²⁰⁵⁻⁴

205.7 As a framework within which to consider the subject of homosexuality, it is important to acknowledge, with all due humility, that basic to the Bahá'í Teachings is the concept that it is only God Who knows the purpose of human life, and Who can convey this to us through His Manifestations. A distinguishing feature of human existence is that we have been given the capacity to know and love God and to consciously obey Him. Thus we also have the converse: the ability to turn away from God, to fail to love Him and to disobey Him. Indeed, left to himself, man is naturally inclined towards evil. Human beings need not only assistance in defining acceptable

205-3. SWAB, no. 102.1; SAQ, p. 215.

205-4. LG, no. 698.

behavior of one person towards another, but also guidance which will help them to refrain from doing that which is spiritually damaging to themselves. By responding to the Message of the Manifestation of God we learn how we should live and draw on the spiritual strength which comes with it. Through studying the Word of God and training ourselves to follow His commandments, we rise to the full stature that He has designed for us.

The material world, in relation to the spiritual world, is a world of imperfections. It is full of dangers and difficulties which have been greatly aggravated by man's neglect and misuse of his responsibilities. Human society itself, which exists in the material world, is in disastrous disarray. 205.8

Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health, depending upon factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and our own treatment of them. Genetic variations occur, producing conditions which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quickness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in handicaps or diseases of various kinds. 205.9

Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that is revealed to us in the divine Teachings. 205.10

The view that homosexuality is a condition that is not amenable to change is to be questioned by Bahá'ís. There are, of course, many kinds and degrees of homosexuality, and overcoming extreme conditions is sure to be more difficult than overcoming others. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the Guardian has stated, that "through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap."²⁰⁵⁻⁵ 205.11

The statistics which indicate that homosexuality is incurable are undoubtedly distorted by the fact that many of those who overcome the problem never speak about it in public, and others solve their problems without even consulting professional counselors. 205.12

Nevertheless there are undoubtedly cases in which the individual finds himself (or herself) unable to eliminate a physical attraction to members 205.13

205-5. LG, no. 1223.

of the same sex, even though he succeeds in controlling his behavior. This is but one of the many trials and temptations to which human beings are subject in this life. For Bahá'ís, it cannot alter the basic concept taught by Bahá'u'lláh, that the kind of sexuality purposed by God is the love between a man and a woman, and that its primary (but not its only) purpose is the bringing of children into this world and providing them with a loving and protective environment in which they can be reared to know and love God. If, therefore, a homosexual cannot overcome his or her condition to the extent of being able to have a heterosexual marriage, he or she must remain single, and abstain from sexual relations. These are the same requirements as for a heterosexual person who does not marry. While Bahá'u'lláh encourages the believers to marry, it is important to note that marriage is by no means an obligation. It is for the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to lead a family life or to live in a state of celibacy.

205.14 The condition of being sexually attracted to some object other than to a mature member of the opposite sex, a condition of which homosexuality is but one manifestation, is regarded by the Faith as a distortion of true human nature, as a problem to be overcome, no matter what specific physical or psychological condition may be the immediate cause. Any Bahá'í who suffers from such a disability should be treated with understanding, and should be helped to control and overcome it. All of us suffer from imperfections which we must struggle to overcome and we all need one another's understanding and patience.

205.15 To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely against the spirit of Bahá'í Teachings. The doors are open for all of humanity to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstance; this invitation applies to homosexuals as well as to any others who are engaged in practices contrary to the Bahá'í Teachings. Associated with this invitation is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere and persistent effort to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with Divine Law. It is through such adherence to the Bahá'í Teachings that a true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Bahá'í community is achieved and safeguarded.

205.16 When a person wishes to join the Faith and it is generally known that he or she has a problem such as drinking, homosexuality, taking drugs, adultery, etc., the individual should be told in a patient and loving way of the Bahá'í Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a believer is violating Bahá'í standards, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to

determine whether the immoral conduct is flagrant and can bring the name of the Faith into disrepute, in which case the Assembly must take action to counsel the believer and require him or her to make every effort to mend his ways. If the individual fails to rectify his conduct in spite of repeated warnings, sanctions should be imposed. Assemblies, of course, must exercise care not to pry into the private lives of the believers to ensure that they are behaving properly, but should not hesitate to take action in cases of blatant misbehavior.

The Spiritual Assemblies should, to a certain extent, be forbearing in the matter of people's moral conduct, such as homosexuality, in view of the terrible deterioration of society in general. The Assemblies must also bear in mind that while awareness of contemporary social and moral values may well enhance their understanding of the situation of the homosexual, the standard which they are called upon to uphold is the Bahá'í standard. A flagrant violation of this standard disgraces the Bahá'í community in its own eyes even if the surrounding society finds the transgression tolerable. 205.17

With regard to the organized network of homosexual Bahá'ís mentioned in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that, while there is an appropriate role in the Bahá'í community for groups of individuals to come together to help each other to understand and to deal with certain problem situations, according to the Bahá'í Teachings there can be no place in our community for groups which actively promote a style of life that is contrary to the Teachings of the Cause. It should be understood that the homosexual tendencies of some individuals do not entitle them to an identity setting them apart from others. Such individuals share with every other Bahá'í the responsibility to adhere to the laws and principles of the Faith as well as the freedom to exercise their administrative rights. 205.18

The Universal House of Justice will pray that, armed with the guidance contained in this letter, the National Spiritual Assembly will act with love, sensitivity and firmness to assist the believers both to gain a deeper understanding of their true and ennobling purpose in life and to make a strong and determined effort to overcome every handicap to their spiritual development. 205.19

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

206

Moral Delinquency and Hypocrisy

18 OCTOBER 1995

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

206.1 . . . Turning first to the questions which you raised earlier, regarding the so-called “Tablet on Hypocrisy”: At item 39 of the compilation entitled *Trustworthiness* there appears an English translation of a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh which includes a reference to hypocrisy.²⁰⁶⁻¹ This may be the passage to which you refer. It reads as follows:

206.1a Be thou of the people of hell-fire
but be not a hypocrite.
Be thou an unbeliever,
but be not a plotter.
Make thy home in taverns,
but tread not the path
of the mischief-maker.
Fear thou God,
but not the priest.²⁰⁶⁻²
Give to the executioner thy head,
but not thy heart.
Let thine abode be under the stone,
but seek not the shelter of the cleric.

206.1b Thus doth the Holy Reed intone its melodies, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its song, so that He may infuse life eternal into the mortal frames of men, impart to the temples of dust the essence of the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Light, and draw the transient world, through the potency of a single word, unto the Everlasting Kingdom.²⁰⁶⁻³

206-1. See CC 2, pp. 327–54.

206-2. Note that in the published version “people” has been incorrectly given for “priest.”

206-3. CC 2:2050.

In this connection we have been asked to make the following comments. 206.2
 There is an important distinction between hypocrisy on the one hand and, on the other, such attitudes as turning a blind eye to the faults of others, or of concealing one's own faults through a feeling of shame. This distinction plays an important role in the attitude of Spiritual Assemblies towards the members of its community, as well as in the relationship between individuals.

Bahá'í standards of behavior are very high, and it is the task of Spiritual 206.3
 Assemblies to assist the friends in their communities to deepen their understanding of the Teachings and to improve the quality of their lives in obedience to Bahá'í laws and principles. At the same time, it is recognized that individuals are imperfect and that we all fall short, in one way or another, of the exalted standard which Bahá'u'lláh has established. Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers alike are urged to recognize this fact, and to assume that each person is, in his own life, striving to overcome his imperfections. Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls upon each individual to look at a person's good qualities rather than the bad, even though there may be only one good one and ten bad ones. Such an attitude is in no way to be equated with hypocrisy.

A Spiritual Assembly, for its part, is instructed not to pry into the lives 206.4
 of the believers in its community. Before it takes action to caution a Bahá'í about his misconduct, such misconduct should be blatant and thus create a problem not only for the community and the individuals concerned, but also for the good name of the Faith. A Spiritual Assembly may be well aware that one of the members of its community has still not fully overcome the habit of drinking alcohol which he had before accepting the Faith, but chooses to say nothing about it. This is not hypocrisy on its part, it is the exercise of patience and wisdom in dealing with the problem. Nor is the fact that the believer in question drinks secretly necessarily an evidence of hypocrisy on his part, it may simply be a combination of weakness in the face of temptation and of shame at this weakness. If, however, a Bahá'í openly states that he holds the Bahá'í prohibition on drinking alcohol to be an anachronism, and brazenly drinks in public, such an attitude is not the opposite of hypocrisy, it is a blatant disdain for Bahá'í standards which would require the Spiritual Assembly's intervention.

The same principles apply to other moral delinquencies. In the area of 206.5
 sexual morality, a Bahá'í may occasionally behave in a manner which is contrary to Bahá'í standards, because he does not exercise the strength of will necessary to resist temptation. For individuals to gossip about such a lapse is

backbiting, which is itself condemned in the Faith. An Assembly would not normally intervene unless it has reason to believe that such lapses constitute a blatant disregard of Bahá'í law. . . .

206.6 Be assured of the continued prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf that you may be divinely assisted and guided in serving the Cause we love so well.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

207

Appointment of Continental Counselors and Increase in Number of Continental Counselors

29 OCTOBER 1995

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

207.1 The Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1995, marks the commencement of a new five-year term of service for members of the Continental Boards of Counselors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith. We have decided to increase the number of these high-ranking officers of the Cause from seventy-two to eighty-one and are happy to announce the names of those now appointed.

207.1a **Africa (19 Counselors):** George Allen, Beatrice Asare, Niaz Bushrui, Parvine Djoneydi, Mehrnaz Ehsani (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, Kobina Fynn, Ibrahim Galadima, Hizzaya Hissani, Firaydoun Javaheri, Zekrullah Kazemi, Eddy Lutchmaya, Abaineh Merhatsion, Muḥammad Otmani, Daniel Ramoroesi, Edith Senoga, Lally Warren, Wingi Mabuku, Tiati à Zock.

207.1b **The Americas (19 Counselors):** Eloy Anello, Stephen Birkland, Gustavo Correa, Rolf von Czékus, Jacqueline LHB Delahunt, Wilma Ellis, Tod Ewing, Linda Gershuny, Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian, Peter McLaren (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Alejandra Miller, Ruth Pringle, Carmen Elisa de Sadeghian, Isabel de Sánchez, Errol Sealy, Arturo Serrano, Farhad Shayani, David Smith, Rodrigo Tomás.

Asia (18 Counselors): Borhanoddin Afshin, Fadel Ardekani, Jabbar Eidelkhani, Bijan Farid, Elena Gruzskova, David Huang (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Nobuko Iwakura, Abbas Katirai, Kim Myung Jung, Lee Lee Ludher, Payman Mohajer, Perin Olyai, Zenaida Ramirez, Cyrus Rohani, Vicente Samaniego, Zena Sorabjee, George Soraya, Rosalie Tran. 2071c

Australasia (11 Counselors): Ben Ayala, Beatrice Benson, Afemata Moli Chang, David Chittleborough (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Violette Haake, Betra Majmeto, Sírús Naráqí, Bruce Saunders, Heather Simpson, Erama Ugaia, Robin White. 2071d

Europe (14 Counselors): Hooshidar Balazadeh, Uta von Both, Patricia Coles, Louis Hénuzet, Patrick O'Mara (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Nabil Perdu, Maija Pihlainen, Polin Rafat, Shapour Rassekh, Ilhan Sezgin, Nosrat Tirandaz, Larissa Tsutskova, Tiberiu Vajda, Sohrab Youssefian. 2071e

The following fifteen devoted believers are being released from the duties of membership on the Boards of Counselors: Sabir Afaqi, Hushang Ahdieh, Gila Michael Bahta, Friday Ekpe, Kamran Eshraghian, Kassimi Fofana, John Fozdar, Tinai Hancock, Foad Kazemzadeh, Gayle Morrison, Rose Ong, William Roberts, Paul Semenoff, Alan Smith, Shantha Sundram. These distinguished servants of Bahá'u'lláh have earned our abiding gratitude for their impressive and self-sacrificing contributions to the progress of the Cause. Our fervent prayers surround them as they take up the next phase in their service to the Faith. 2072

In the next stage of the Divine Plan, which will begin at Riḍván, the essential role of the Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards in the operation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order will become more evident. During the crucial period ahead they will be required to direct their attention and energies in still greater measure to fostering the evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions and to helping the rank and file of the believers to increase their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, their ardor in teaching, and their ability to draw on the tremendous power latent in the unified action of Bahá'í communities. 2073

The Counselors in all continents are being called to a conference at the World Center of the Faith from 26 through 31 December 1995, to deliberate on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately ahead. 2074

207.5 It is our heartfelt prayer that the exertions of the newly appointed Boards of Counselors may lend a tremendous impetus to the manifold activities of the friends throughout the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

208

Message to the ASEAN Youth Conference

19 DECEMBER 1995

To The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia

208.1 Kindly convey the following message to the ASEAN Youth Conference which is to commence in Kangar, Perlis, on 22 December 1995:

208.1a As you gather for the second ASEAN Youth Conference, we remember with pride the abundant fruit of the first such Conference held in October 1994 in Bangkok, Thailand, and attended by 220 youth from eleven countries. Inspired by that gathering, some 90 youth arose to pioneer or travel-teach in many parts of the region.

208.1b Throughout the early history of the Faith, young people were in the vanguard of service to the beloved Cause, becoming an inspiration to succeeding generations; many attained the glory of martyrdom. The services that Bahá'í youth are called upon to undertake in these times have their particular requirements but are no less demanding of dedication and zeal if the teaching efforts in every country and the building of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order are to be assured.

208.1c Receptive souls throughout Southeast Asia are waiting to hear the message of the Promised One, athirst for His life-giving Teachings. The time to emblazon the name of Bahá'u'lláh upon the hearts and minds of these souls is now. Let the few remaining years of the twentieth century witness monumental victories for the Faith, enhancing beyond imagination the strength of your various communities as they enter the new millennium.

208.1d Turn for your guidance to the Sacred Writings and dedicate yourselves to their systematic and daily study. As they permeate your hearts and minds, so may they strengthen you in your attempts to carry forth the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the only source of the love and vision

necessary to bring about the unity of mankind. We urge you to arise for service, determined to ignite the hearts of young people throughout the region. We will pray ardently at the Holy Threshold for the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty to surround your conference, and your subsequent work for His Holy Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

209

Message to U.S. National Bahá'í Youth Conference

25 DECEMBER 1995

To the friends gathered at the National Bahá'í Youth Conference in Dallas, Texas

Dear Friends,

We send you our warmest greetings and deepest love.

209.1

Your conference coincides with the Counselors' Conference which has drawn 78 Counselors from the five continents to the Holy Land for discussions with the International Teaching Center concerning the provisions of the next global teaching and consolidation plan to be launched at Ridván 1996. You may well draw inspiration from this coincidence as you take advantage of your togetherness to contemplate during the next few days the opportunities available to the Bahá'í youth both to bend their efforts towards great achievements in the teaching field during the remaining months of the Three Year Plan and to ensure through such achievements a fitting initiation for the new Plan, which will be in operation during the closing years of the unique Twentieth Century.

209.2

The threat of disintegration and chaos, on the one hand, and the promise of unity and peace, on the other, flash intermittently as prospects at this time of great transition for the entire human race. Unity and peace will triumph, we know; but until then humanity will surely experience trials and turmoil. Amid these can be found the countless opportunities to teach those, especially among your peers, who seek understanding and hope. The perspective which enables us to see clearly during this time of great perplexity is provided in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in the life and deeds of our true Exemplar, 'Abdu'l-Bahá; these are abundant resources to which the followers of the Blessed

209.3

Beauty, young and old alike, can turn time and again for knowledge, inspiration and assurance.

209.4 May your collective and individual capacity for action increase as you take occasions such as this conference both to obtain a deeper understanding of your purpose and goal in life and to mobilize your efforts, in word and deed, to spread the glad tidings and demonstrate the revolutionizing effects of the appearance of the Lord of Hosts. Being among the ones who will increasingly be shouldering the responsibilities for the evolution of the Order of Bahá'ú'lláh, the very pattern of future society, you, like the Bahá'í youth in every other land, can do no less than consider seriously what each and all of you will do now towards victoriously meeting the challenges and opportunities of these troubled but dynamic times.

209.5 We shall continue to pray ardently in the Holy Shrines for your success in every respect.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

210

Message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

26 DECEMBER 1995

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors
Beloved Friends,

210.1 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,"²¹⁰⁻¹ 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 Riḍván 1996. The provisions of that Plan are to be the focus of your consultations in the coming six days.

210.2 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

210-1. PUP, p. 194.

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? 210.3

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. 210.4

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

211

Publication of a Persian Edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

28 DECEMBER 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice announces with great pleasure that a Persian edition of the Most Holy Book is expected to be available for distribution by mid-January 1996. 211.1

The text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself remains in the original Arabic. This has been written by a skilled calligrapher in Naskh script and appropriately illuminated. The other Sacred Writings comprised in the volume will be in the original language, Arabic or Persian, while the introduction, notes and other supplementary material of the English edition have been translated into Persian. 211.2

- 211.3 The Persian edition of 30,000 copies is being published by World Center Publications and will be distributed by Bahá'í-Verlag, the German Bahá'í Publishing Trust. We enclose a copy of a letter from Bahá'í-Verlag giving ordering and price details.
- 211.4 Kindly inform the friends in your community of the imminent release of this publication. To facilitate your communication of this important matter to the Iranian friends in your community, we enclose a translation of this letter into Persian.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

212

Deliberations on the Upcoming Four Year Plan at the Counselors' Conference

31 DECEMBER 1995

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dearly loved Friends,

- 212.1 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.
- 212.2 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 Rúḥíyyih Khánum, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the members of the Universal House of Justice and the Counselor members of the International Teaching Center. 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.
- 212.3 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. 212.4

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. 212.5

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: 212.6

- Developments in the mode of the functioning of the Continental Boards of Counselors. 212.6a
- 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. 212.6b
- 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 212.6c

which the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members will become more intimately involved.

- 212.6d – 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.
- 212.6e – 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.

212.7 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. 212.8

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. 212.9

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

213

Preparations for the Four Year Plan

31 DECEMBER 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to its message of today's date addressed to the Bahá'ís of the world, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to send you the enclosed copy of its message of 26 December 1995 addressed to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors. This is intended to place in your hands, particularly for your own understanding and that of your committees which you feel would benefit from it, the text of the guidance given by 213.1

the House of Justice to the Counselors so as to prepare them for their role in the execution of the forthcoming Four Year Plan. You need not publish this message, but you are free to do so if you wish.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26 DECEMBER 1995

The Four Year Plan

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors
Dearly loved Friends,

213.2 Our deliberations on the Four Year Plan have benefited enormously from the analysis the International Teaching Center prepared for us of conditions in the Bahá'í world, based on its constant interaction with the Counselors 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.

213.3 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 Counselors; 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 Counselors 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.

213.4 At Ridván 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.”²¹³⁻¹ 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 ^{213.5} 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 ^{213.6} 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 Counselors 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 Center will not be necessary; copies should, nonetheless, be forwarded to it.

213-1. BA, p. 66.

213.7 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

213.8 In the discharge of their vital responsibilities during the Four Year Plan, the Continental Boards of Counselors 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.

213.9 Certain Counselor functions, including the supervision and guidance of the Auxiliary Board members in an area, are generally best performed by one Counselor 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 Counselors. 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 Counselors are used in a complementary fashion. Further ways and means should be devised by each Continental Board of Counselors to enable the Assemblies and communities to benefit, to the extent feasible, from the varied talents of the Counselors. This may well involve periodic in-depth consultation among a group of Counselors 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.

213.10 Fundamental to the work of the Counselors 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 Counselors, 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 Counselor 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 Counselors on the Board.

Another aspect of the work of the Counselors which merits further attention is the interaction between Counselors 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 North-eastern 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. 213.11

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 Counselors. In this way, between the close of the conference and Ríḍván, groups of Counselors 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. 213.12

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. 213.13

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- 213.14

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.

213.15 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.

213.16 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.

213.17 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 Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in their operation is essential. Such involvement will help the Counselors 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.”²¹³⁻² These institutes will provide the Counselors 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 Counselors 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 Counselors and with their full support; Auxiliary Board members may serve on these bodies. 213.18

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 213.19

213-2. BA, pp. 3, 8.

the institutions in a region depends, as do all other matters, on skilled and confirmed supporters of the Faith.

213.20 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 Center, 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.

213.21 We are placing at the disposal of the Teaching Center 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.

213.22 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.

213.23 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. 213.24

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 213.25

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

213.26 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.

213.27 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.

213.28 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.

213.29 With these thoughts in mind, we have decided that, beginning at Riḍván 1997, the practice of electing all Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Riḍván will be reinstated. We recognize that the immediate result may be a reduction in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies at Riḍván 1997, but we are confident that subsequent years will witness a steady increase.

213.30 The National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies on the one hand, and the Counselors 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 Counselors 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. 213.31

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. 213.32

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, 213.33

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.”²¹³⁻³

213.34 Be assured that we will remember each and all of you in the Holy Shrines.
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

214

Formation of Two New National Spiritual Assemblies

15 FEBRUARY 1996

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

214.1 We take great joy in announcing the formation next Riḍván of two new National Spiritual Assemblies, one in Africa and one in Europe:

214.1a The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of São Tomé and Príncipe with its seat in São Tomé, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Nigeria.

214.1b The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Moldova with its seat in Chişinău, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Ukraine and Moldova.

214.2 The Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine and Moldova with its seat in Kiev will become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Ukraine.

213-3. ADJ, ¶76.

We are delighted by these further evidences of the extension of the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order as the conclusion of the Three Year Plan approaches. May the friends throughout the world derive fresh impetus from these developments and, with confidence in the assurance of Bahá'u'lláh's confirmations and assistance, concentrate their energies on spreading His redemptive Message. 214.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

215

No Distinction between Scholars and Laymen

14 MARCH 1996

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

. . . You express disquiet that attempts being made to introduce a distinction between “Bahá'í laymen” and “Bahá'í scholars” with respect to the study of the Faith tend to generate a spirit of disunity among the friends. Your concern is fully justified. Such an approach to the study of the Cause would betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the pattern of Bahá'í society as set out in the Teachings of the Faith. 215.1

As you know, Bahá'u'lláh says that the pursuit of knowledge has been enjoined upon everyone, and knowledge itself is described by Him as “wings to man's life” and “a ladder for his ascent.”²¹⁵⁻¹ Those whose high attainments in this respect make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to the advancement of civilization are deserving of society's recognition and gratitude. 215.2

In the study of the Revelation of God, an individual's proficiency in one of the physical or social sciences, in law, philology, or other fields of specialization will often throw valuable light on issues being examined, and such contributions are greatly to be appreciated. The field of Near East studies, mentioned in your letter, is one that can assist in this way. However, no one specialization among the many branches of scholarly research can confer upon its practitioners an authoritative role in the common effort of exploring the implications of so staggering and all-encompassing a body of truth. 215.3

215-1. ESW, p. 26.

215.4 Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic 'ulamá came to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to underline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:

215.4a But praise be to God 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.

215.5 The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as “a day that shall not be followed by night.”²¹⁵⁻² Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith's message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:

215.5a Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It has become desolate. . . .

215.5b 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.

215-2. SH, ¶63.

The promotion of learning of every kind among the Faith's members is an activity fundamental to the achievement of the community's wide-ranging goals. Consequently, the encouragement of individual believers to acquire knowledge, the operation of Bahá'í schools, universities, and training institutes, the organization of study groups, and the work of task forces dedicated to relating the principles of the Revelation to the challenges facing humankind all represent activities with which both the Counselors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the other, must concern themselves. In shouldering these demanding responsibilities, Bahá'í institutions everywhere find their efforts greatly enhanced by the assistance of believers whose intellectual pursuits, qualities of character, and devotion to the Cause particularly fit them to contribute their services. ^{215.6}

A special responsibility in the matter rests on the Counselors because of the duty assigned to them to assist in releasing the potential of the individual believer. The members of this institution, appointed for specific terms, have been given the task of carrying forward into the future the functions of the protection and propagation of the Faith conferred in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the Hands of the Cause. Thus, the Counselors are called on 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."²¹⁵⁻³ Like the Hands, the Counselors have no interpretive authority, an authority conferred by the Covenant only on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Faith. While some Counselors, like some of the Hands, will have pursued various academic or professional disciplines in their individual careers, their discharge of their duties is not dependent on proficiencies of this kind. All of them share fully in the vital task of encouraging believers everywhere in the acquisition of knowledge, in all its dimensions. All share, too, in the responsibility assigned to the institution of which they are members to protect the Faith against its enemies, both external and internal, a concern to which both the Master and the Guardian attached preeminent importance. . . .

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

215-3. BA, p. 8.

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Riḍván Message 1996

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

216.1 Our hearts overflowing with gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, we acknowledge the abundant manifestations of His grace during the Three Year Plan, which has run its course with the advent of this Riḍván Festival. The animating spirit of the Holy Year, which lent impetus to the launching of the Plan at Riḍván 1993, pervaded this period of concentrated endeavor, rendering our world community more consolidated, more resilient, more mature, and more confident than before. At the same time, the community's prestige attained new heights. While this Plan has not ended on a note of dramatic, numerical expansion, even though significant growth of membership occurred in various countries, it has nonetheless resulted in a qualitatively enriched community—one prepared to exploit the immediate prospects for the advancement of the Faith.

216.2 The magnificent progress of the projects on Mount Carmel is preeminent among the measurable achievements of this period. Indeed, despite numerous difficulties, the stage of accomplishment anticipated in our message announcing the Three Year Plan is entirely evident. All phases of construction have been initiated. The structural framework of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the International Archives Building has been raised up and the work on these buildings has advanced towards initiation of the exterior and interior finishing work. The erection of the permanent seat of the International Teaching Center, the third structure currently being built on the Arc, is progressing rapidly. Seven terraces below the Shrine of the Báb are now completed, foreshowing the unfolding splendor from the foot to the ridge of God's Holy Mountain. A watchful public is awed at the tapestry of beauty spreading over the mountainside.

216.3 The physical reality of the progress thus far so marvelously realized is proof of an even more profound achievement, namely, the unity of purpose effected throughout our global community in the pursuit of this gigantic, collective enterprise. The intensity of the interest and support it has evoked has expressed itself in an unprecedented outpouring of contributions, reflecting a level of sacrifice that bespeaks the quality of faith and generosity

of heart of Bahá'u'lláh's lovers throughout the planet. That contributions towards the Mount Carmel Projects have met the three-year goal of seventy-four million dollars marks yet another measurable and exceptional achievement, inspiring confidence that the necessary financial support for these projects will continue until their completion by the end of the century.

The signs of progress during the past three years were evident in a wide and varied field. The remarkable efforts to expand and consolidate the community, the increased ventures in social and economic development, and the unprecedented thrust of the external affairs work combine to portray a community endowed with new capacities. 216.4

In the arena of teaching, there was a general increase of activity as indicated by the formation of twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies during the course of the Plan and by the surge of pioneering and travel-teaching. Believers in many countries were galvanized by the fresh approach suggested in the pioneer call released during the Plan. The number of pioneers from and to various countries was high, and there was a veritable flood of traveling teachers operating both at home and abroad. Systematic approaches to collective teaching activities and well-focused long-term teaching projects were fruitful and were more evident than ever before in a number of countries. 216.5

The energy and creativity attendant to the various developments in expansion and consolidation owed much to the spirit of enterprise shown by the International Teaching Center. Its constant direction and encouragement of the Continental Boards of Counselors; its recommendation of new methods for the deployment of pioneers, as endorsed by the Universal House of Justice in the pioneer call released in the early months of the Plan, and its regular assistance to the Continental Pioneer Committees placed in its charge; its unflagging attention to the educational needs of the community as expressed in its interactions with Counselors concerning the inclusion in teaching projects of deepening programs for new believers, the devising of courses and workshops for training in different capacities, the training of children's teachers, and the multiplication of children's classes; its stimulation of efforts to establish training institutes in different parts of the world—all have produced resounding results. Major credit must also go to the Teaching Center for the influence it exerted through the Counselors on the adoption of core literature programs in an increasing number of countries. Through such programs a few titles essential to the propagation of the Faith and the deepening of the believers were selected, printed in large 216.6

quantities and made available at reduced prices. The outstanding progress in the evolution of this vital institution operating at the World Center was palpable in its preparation and conduct of the Counselors' Conference last December which set the course for the work of these high-ranking officers of the Faith during the immediate years ahead.

216.7 A relevant development was the notable rise in the assumption of responsibility by indigenous believers for the teaching and consolidation work in their own countries. In greatly troubled areas, such as Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the friends claimed important victories, whether in pursuing teaching activities which resulted in numerically significant enrollments, or in establishing and reactivating Bahá'í Assemblies, or in initiating and sustaining development projects. In places with recently formed National Spiritual Assemblies, such as countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the friends have shown an admirable capacity for administering the affairs of the Cause. A highlight of this period was the upsurge of vigor, courage and creativity in Bahá'í island communities throughout the world. The categories of activity were wide-ranging, involving the raising up of local teachers, the training and dispatch of scores of traveling teachers to neighboring islands, the inauguration of primary schools, the multiple occasions for proclamation of the Faith, the sponsorship of events attended by high-ranking officials and influential persons. The fact that in recent years a number of government leaders of island nations have visited the Bahá'í World Center is indicative of the vitality of the activities of the believers in these small lands scattered throughout the seven seas. Taken together, all the foregoing examples of the attitudes and efforts of the friends in different settings demonstrate a heightened commitment to the teaching work and a growing maturity and resilience reflective of the depth of faith motivating Bahá'ís from diverse populations.

216.8 Consonant with these observations were the outstanding contributions of the youth to expansion and consolidation. Their activities took on added dimensions during the three-year period. Actuated by youth conferences and other gatherings attentive to their interests, youth throughout the world invested immense amounts of time, energy and zeal in the teaching work as traveling teachers within and outside their countries and as teams in collective teaching projects and, in so doing, they stimulated hundreds of new enrollments and the formation of many Local Spiritual Assemblies; involvement of youth in music and the arts as a means of proclaiming and teaching the Cause distinguished their exertions in many places; the spread

of dance and drama workshops was particularly effective; participation of youth in external affairs opened new possibilities for the Faith in this field; commitment to a year of service was more widely demonstrated; at the same time there was a notable increase in the number of youth acquiring formal training and achieving academic, professional and vocational excellence—altogether an indication that the youth are doing more in direct service to the Faith while at the same time contributing to the general development of society.

Signs of the consolidation of the community were also discernible in the greater involvement of the friends in social and economic development, particularly in the field of education. In one outstanding instance, a government asked the Bahá'ís to take responsibility for the management of seven public schools, and they did so with the backing of the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center. Worthy of note is that in Africa Bahá'í communities in exile because of political unrest in their home country continued to develop farming and other projects that went far towards ensuring self-sufficiency. Efforts at improving the status of women gathered momentum in a number of countries where, in addition to Bahá'í participation in projects sponsored by other organizations, the Bahá'í institutions set up committees and offices to attend to the interests of women. The Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women emerged as a symbol of this upswing. 216.9

In a number of countries, too, there was significant Bahá'í participation in government-sponsored programs to improve health; in other instances Bahá'í groups initiated such programs and carried them out. The work in social and economic development was also distinguished by the firm establishment and consolidation of a number of major projects and organizations. Three pilot literacy projects were begun as a first step in a literacy campaign which the Office of Social and Economic Development intends to extend throughout the world. The Bahá'í initiation and involvement in development projects also resulted in proclamation of the Faith as they attracted the participation of the public and the interest of mass media. 216.10

A thrust in the external affairs work exceeding all previous records for a similar period boosted the proclamation of the Cause. A prodigy of effort in all parts of the world redounded to a much greater visibility of the Faith than obtained before and to a consequent rise in the prestige of the Bahá'í international community. The broad lines of progress were evident in the ease with which Bahá'í communities, large and small, sponsored or partici- 216.11

pated in public events; in the emergence of the Bahá'ís as a force in society recognized by governmental and nongovernmental organizations and many prominent persons; in the ready accessibility of the media. Indeed, the wide coverage accorded Bahá'í events and interests by the print and electronic communications media was beyond calculation.

216.12 In the sweep of activities throughout the world, certain specific developments stood out: the frequency with which high public officials would invite Bahá'ís to participate in or assist with events or projects; the successful initiatives of Bahá'ís in influencing government action; the establishment of Bahá'í academic programs and courses in colleges and universities and the adoption of curricular material for public schools; the use of the arts by Bahá'í institutions, groups and individuals in proclamation events.

216.13 During 1995, two major United Nations events exemplified the gathering momentum of an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings, and these engaged the active attention and participation of the Bahá'í community. First, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen during March involved 250 friends from more than 40 countries who mounted an impressive effort to acquaint the summit participants and the related NGO Forum with the Teachings. It was on this occasion that the statement *The Prosperity of Humankind*, produced by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, was first distributed and discussed. Follow-up activities all over the world included the holding of conferences and seminars, as well as the distribution of the statement. Second, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the concomitant NGO Forum held in Beijing during September drew the attendance of more than 500 Bahá'ís from around the world, in addition to the official delegation of the Bahá'í International Community. In that same year, a third event, the observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, prompted the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office to produce and distribute a statement, entitled "Turning Point for All Nations,"²¹⁶⁻¹ containing proposals for the development of that world organization.

216.14 Also of particular note among the external affairs activities were two occasions involving the prominent participation of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Last spring she headed the delegation of the four official Bahá'í

216-1. The text of the statement is available online at <http://www.ibiblio.org/Bahai/Texts/English/Turning-Point-For-All-Nations.html>.

representatives to the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation, patronized by His Royal Highness Prince Philip and held at Windsor Castle. During October Rūḥíyyih Khánum was the keynote speaker at the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to Global Society held under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and organized by the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace and the Department of History at the University of Maryland.

Nor can we neglect to mention certain other significant marks of the period under review. An edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in the original Arabic was published with, for the first time, notes in Persian, supplementing the text as in the English edition. The Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh became more deeply rooted in the hearts of the believers throughout the world, and during the final year of the Plan, the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, took up residence in the Holy Land. This significant step also means that all three Hands of the Cause of God—Amatu'l-Bahá Rūḥíyyih Khánum, Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, and Dr. Varqá—are now residing at the World Center, bringing inspiration to pilgrims and visitors, and to the friends serving at the World Center.

It is against such a background of heartening developments that we embark at this Riḍván upon a Four Year Plan that will carry us to Riḍván 2000. We earnestly and lovingly call upon our brothers and sisters of every land to join us in a mobilization of effort that will ensure to generations of the fast-approaching twenty-first century an abundant and lasting legacy.

The Four Year Plan aims at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. As we have stated earlier, such an advance is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community.

The phrase “advance in the process of entry by troops” accommodates the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities allow for a sustained growth of the Bahá'í world community on a large scale; that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh—the individual, the institutions, and the community—can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and develop-

ment, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá'í Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.

^{216.19} Moreover, to advance the process implies that that process is already in progress and that local and national communities are at different stages of it. All communities are now tasked to take steps and sustain efforts to achieve a level of expansion and consolidation commensurate with their possibilities. The individual and the institutions, while operating in distinctive spheres, are summoned to arise to meet the requirements of this crucial time in the life of our community and in the fortunes of all humankind.

^{216.20} The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend. Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to "consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith."²¹⁶⁻²

^{216.21} To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. In addition to these, the individual, having been given the duty to teach the Cause, is endowed with the capacity to attract particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh. "Whoso openeth his lips in this Day," the Blessed Beauty asserts, "and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-

216-2. ADJ, ¶76.

Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.”²¹⁶⁻³

Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative and action. He explained that without the support of the individual, “at once wholehearted, continuous and generous,” every measure and plan of his National Spiritual Assembly is “foredoomed to failure,” the purpose of the Master’s Divine Plan is “impeded”; furthermore, the sustaining strength of Bahá’u’lláh Himself “will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.”²¹⁶⁻⁴ Hence, at the very crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action. Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the Guardian’s advice: “Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyze their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts. Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master. . . . Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.”²¹⁶⁻⁵

As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá’í community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Bahá’u’lláh’s avowed supporters in all lands.

216-3. *GWB*, no. 129.3.

216-4. *CF*, p. 131.

216-5. *ALNZ*, p. 34.

216.24 For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers' capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá'í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.

216.25 The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is a necessary development to which much attention is required both with respect to places where large-scale enrollment has occurred and in anticipation of more numerous instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá'ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

216.26 As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of

the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, worldwide effort to develop human resources must be made. The endeavor of individuals to conduct study classes in their homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruction, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding community. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programs of training on a regular schedule. Access of the institute to physical facilities will of course be necessary, but it may not require a building of its own. 216.27

This matter calls for an intensification of the collaboration between the Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. For the success of these training institutes will depend in very large measure on the active involvement of the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members in their operation. Particularly will it be necessary for Auxiliary Board members to have a close working relationship with institutes and, of course, with the Local Spiritual Assemblies whose communities will benefit from institute programs. Since institutes are to be regarded as centers of learning, and since their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exercise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members, the intimate involvement in institute operations should now become a part of the evolving functions of these officers of the Faith. Drawing on the talents and abilities of increasing numbers of believers will also be crucial to the development and execution of institute programs. 216.28

As the term “institute” has assumed various uses in the Bahá'í community, a word of clarification is needed. The next four years will represent an 216.29

extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centers of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.

216.30 “Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá'u'lláh thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation. . . .”²¹⁶⁻⁶ Just as one deputizes another to teach in one's stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

216.31 In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for attracting attention to the Teachings. A letter written on his behalf to an individual thus conveys the Guardian's view: “The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.”²¹⁶⁻⁷

216.32 While the friends and institutions everywhere bend their energies to implementing the requirements of the Plan, work on the great projects on Mount Carmel will continue towards their anticipated completion at the end of the century. By the end of the Plan at Riqdán 2000, the buildings

216-6. GWB, no. 96.3

216-7. CC 1:26.

for the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension of the Archives Building will become operational; the International Teaching Center building will have advanced to the final finishing stage. The section of the public road which now interrupts the path of the terraces above the Shrine of the Báb will have been lowered and a broad connecting bridge with its own gardens will have been built; five of the upper terraces will also have been completed. The remaining four upper terraces and the two at the foot of the mountain will be in an advanced stage of development. Other particular efforts will be pursued at the World Center as well. Attention will be given to such matters as the universal application of additional laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the preparation of a new volume in English of selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the further development of the functions of the International Teaching Center, and the devising of measures for increasing the number of pilgrims and visitors to the World Center.

The Bahá'í world community will expand its endeavors in both social and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and opportunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of development projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly through the community's involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the pursuit of these themes, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Bahá'ís and the United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the Bahá'í institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and increased efforts to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and nongovernmental organizations. In all such respects the Bahá'í friends and institutions are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external affairs and to give renewed attention to them.

The formation this Riḍván of two National Spiritual Assemblies lends a propitious beginning to the Four Year Plan. We are delighted to announce that our two representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, Moldova;

and Mr. Fred Schechter, Counselor member of the International Teaching Center, São Tomé and Príncipe. Regrettably, due to circumstances entirely beyond their control, the National Spiritual Assemblies of Burundi and Rwanda cannot be reelected this year. The number of these institutions worldwide will consequently remain at 174.

216.35 Riḍván 2000, the point at which the Four Year Plan is to be concluded, will come many months before the end of the twentieth century. At that juncture in time, the Bahá'í world will look back in appreciation at the extraordinary developments and dazzling achievements that will have distinguished the annals of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh during that eventful period—a period which 'Abdu'l-Bahá called the “century of light.”²¹⁶⁻⁸ Not the least of the accomplishments then to be recognized will be the completion of the current projects on Mount Carmel which, together with the other edifices on that holy mountain, will stand as a monument to the progress which the Administrative Order will have attained by that time in the Formative Age. The highlight of such appreciations will, God willing, be the holding at the World Center of a major event to mark the completion of the buildings on the Arc and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb to the public.

216.36 Beloved Friends, we enter this Plan amid the turbulence of a period of accelerating transition. The twin processes prompted by the impact of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation are fast at work, gathering a momentum that will, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet.” One is an integrating process; the other is disruptive. Out of the “universal fermentation” created by these processes, peace will emerge in stages, through which the unifying effects of a growing consciousness of world citizenship will become manifest.²¹⁶⁻⁹

216.37 Towards that end, recent world developments have, paradoxically, been both shocking and reassuring. On one hand, the disarray of human affairs produces a daily diet of horrors that numb the senses; on the other, world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá'í observer, signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations to solving world problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual frequency of the global occasions on which these leaders have gathered since the Holy Year four years ago, such as the one in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the

216-8. PUP, p. 90.

216-9. WOB, p. 170.

United Nations, at which the attending heads of state and heads of government asserted their commitment to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have been acting together in responding to a variety of crises in different parts of the world. Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?

Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on any Bahá'í plan or action, and although it will not represent the ultimate goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace. The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the Bahá'í System that we will attract the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these processes. Two main challenges face us: one is to mount a campaign of teaching in which the broad membership of our community is enthusiastically, systematically and personally engaged, and in which the activation of an extensive training program will ensure the development of a mass of human resources; the other is to complete the construction projects on Mount Carmel towards which every sacrifice must be made to provide a liberal outpouring of material means. These twin foci, if resolutely pursued, will foster conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet.

However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God's Faith, as the Most Great Peace. In the meantime, people everywhere will often face despair and bewilderment before arriving at an appreciation of the transition in progress. We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent in the land in which our Cause was born.

For some seventeen years our persecuted brethren in Iran have demonstrated a constancy of faith and courage that has produced a vast proclama-

tion of the Faith, forcing it out of obscurity. Here then is living evidence in our own time of the potencies of crisis and victory. Please God, it may not be too long before our Iranian brethren are relieved of the yoke they bear and are ushered into the glories and wonders of a victory that only the Blessed Beauty can bestow. Their experience is a signal and an example to us all wherever we may live; for eventually, opposition, as the Master has told us, will rear its head on all the continents. Though it may be of a different character from place to place, it will no doubt be intensive. But, thanks to the strengthening grace of Bahá'u'lláh and the demonstration of steadfastness by these noble friends, we shall know how to meet the shafts of the enemy without fear. Indeed, the Lord of Hosts has promised to deliver to His people an overwhelming and decisive triumph.

216.41 As humanity is tossed and tormented by the ravages inflicted upon it by a civilization gone out of control, let us keep our heads and hearts focused on the divine tasks set before us. For amid this turmoil opportunities will abound that must be exploited “for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.”²¹⁶⁻¹⁰ This Plan to which we are now committed is set at one of the most critical times in the life of the planet. It is meant to prepare our community to cope with the accelerating changes that are occurring in the world about us and to place the community in a position both to withstand the weight of the accompanying tests and challenges and to make more visible a pattern of functioning to which the world can turn for aid and example in the wake of a tumultuous transition. Thus, this Plan acquires a special place in the scheme of Bahá'í and world history. Those of us who are alive to the vision of the Faith are particularly privileged to be consciously engaged in efforts intended to stimulate and eventually enhance such processes.

216.42 May you all arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment. May each inscribe his or her own mark on a brief span of time so charged with potentialities and hope for all humanity. Lest you become distracted or preoccupied with the drastic happenings of this age of transition, bear ever in mind the advice of our infallible guide, Shoghi Effendi: “Not ours, puny mortals that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps

216-10. ADJ, ¶73.

which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection. . . . Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose of, to labor serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation of the forces which, as marshaled and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, are leading humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of power and glory.”²¹⁶⁻¹¹

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

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Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Latin America and the Caribbean

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Latin America and the Caribbean
Dearly loved Friends,

As you contemplate the challenges awaiting you during these closing ²¹⁷¹ years of the century, you may draw confidence from the knowledge that your past endeavors have been abundantly blessed by divine confirmation. Some sixty years ago, when the Guardian had called for the establishment of at least one center in each of the Central and South American Republics, he wrote of “the strenuous and organized labors by which future generations of believers in the Latin countries must distinguish themselves.”²¹⁷⁻¹ Addressing the friends in the Caribbean some years later in a letter written shortly after the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of the Greater Antilles, he urged them to exert “continuous and systematic effort,” to evince “unyielding determination” and to display “wholehearted consecration.” Your achievements during the intervening decades have amply demonstrated your capacity to meet his expectations. You have proved by the spirit animating your efforts to be well deserving of such tributes as “staunch,” “warmhearted,” “eager,” “spiritually minded.”

216-11. PUP, ¶303.

217-1. ADJ, ¶90.

217.2 The central concern of the plans that will guide your endeavors during the coming four years will be to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This challenge you will not be facing as novices. You have accumulated through successive plans valuable experience which must now be brought to bear on the aim of the Four Year Plan with clarity and single-mindedness. Your success will depend on the degree to which you can, on the one hand, intensify activity in the areas that have already witnessed large-scale expansion and, on the other, exploit the fresh opportunities presented to you as a result of your growing involvement in the affairs of society.

217.3 Your numerical strength lies in those many regions where, over the decades, intense teaching activities have been undertaken among diverse populations. Through these exertions, large numbers from most of the indigenous tribes—singled out by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be the recipients of special favors and promises—as well as people of the African, Asian and European races, have enlisted under the banner of the Faith. As a result, your community now boasts of a harmonious blend of groups from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

217.4 Plans focusing on these areas of large-scale expansion will necessarily seek to mobilize an appreciable number of believers within each population not only to labor diligently in their own local communities, but also to serve as long- and short-term pioneers and visiting teachers in other localities. Training programs, with which many of your communities have considerable experience, constitute a most potent instrument for the accomplishment of such a vast mobilization. We call upon you, then, to support the work of the training institutes in your countries, the more experienced among you giving generously of their time as teachers so that courses can be offered widely and consistently. As you acquire new knowledge and skills through these programs, you will be able to put into practice with enthusiasm and zeal what you have learned, and arise to shoulder the manifold responsibilities that accelerated expansion and consolidation demand.

217.5 This mobilization will greatly facilitate the development of local communities, a task that in the past has not been an easy one to accomplish. Your labors in this field of endeavor must now be systematically and vigorously multiplied, utilizing the valuable methods and approaches that have been devised in many of your countries in recent years. A host of dedicated workers is needed within each population who, supported by Auxiliary Board members, regional committees and institutes, focus their energies on the

strengthening of community after community. Let those of you who arise, even when you can find but a handful of believers in a locality, gather them together, broaden their vision, and raise their awareness of the greatness of the Cause they have embraced. Help the Local Spiritual Assembly to launch the community on a path of systematic expansion and consolidation, bringing in new recruits or revitalizing those who, having accepted the Faith years ago, have seen their enthusiasm wane. Remember, moreover, that in this process of community building the education of children—without which the victories of a whole generation may be lost—must be given due emphasis.

While paying close attention to areas of large-scale expansion, you should not lose sight of the fact that your nations have undergone profound change over the past decades, resulting in increased receptivity to the Faith in many sectors of society. You have, in each of your national communities, developed remarkable capacity to interact with society at large. Through your extensive work in social and economic development, especially in the area of education, through your discourse on issues such as the preservation of the environment and the organization of social action, through your substantive interactions with leaders of thought, you are developing a keen understanding of the needs and aspirations of your peoples which enhances your ability to present the Faith to a wide range of interests. 217.6

Together with your increased involvement in the affairs of society, you will need to make a concerted effort to attract receptive souls from diverse groups, teaching them and confirming them in the Faith. In this respect, the climate of search prevailing among both the leaders and the masses in your countries, which has emerged following the ideological upheaval of recent years, is of special significance. Two sectors have been particularly and differently affected and are athirst for the life-giving waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: on the one hand, the teachers in the national school systems and, on the other, university students and their professors. Historically, both have exerted widespread influence in your societies, and should you teach them systematically, you will certainly reap abundant fruits. 217.7

In all of this great endeavor—pursuing large-scale expansion and consolidation, furthering the work of external affairs and carrying out activities of social and economic development—you must be driven by a passion to teach the Faith. Let regular study of the Writings feed the flame of your enthusiasm. Let His Words so shape your thoughts that the most pressing obligation of your lives becomes the sharing of His Message with others. 217.8

The designation given to the Latin American communities by the Guardian as the associates of the chief executors of the Divine Plan has defined for you a vast arena of service. As you take up the tasks of the Four Year Plan, keep in mind the words of the Guardian calling on the individual believer to “. . . shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.”²¹⁷⁻²

^{217.9} We shall remember each and all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá’u’lláh to vouchsafe to you His unfailing protection and guidance, as you boldly go forth to conquer the hearts of men.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

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Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Indian Subcontinent and Region

RİDVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Dearly loved Friends,

^{218.1} With bright hopes and high expectations, we turn our thoughts towards you, who, serving in a region at the forefront of large-scale expansion, find yourselves poised to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, the central aim of the Four Year Plan. Your region, which claims a substantial percentage of the world’s people, has a Bahá’í population that already exceeds by far that of any other area of the globe.

^{218.2} By virtue of its immense natural and human resources, its magnificent history and the rich cultural diversity of its inhabitants, India plays a promi-

217-2. CC 2:1336.

ment role in the shaping of human affairs. Throughout the history of the Faith, it has been the recipient of countless blessings and the arena of unparalleled triumphs. Mentioned by the Báb in the first of His Writings, India is eternally honored to have had one of its native sons numbered among the Letters of the Living, privileged to behold the first rays of the Dawn of a New Day. Bahá'u'lláh Himself selected and dispatched emissaries to propagate His Faith in India, and, under the direction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, streams of teachers from both Iran and the West continued to flow to that land to help the believers carry forward the standard of Divine guidance.

In response to the bountiful favors conferred upon them over the decades, 218.3 the friends in India have made sacrificial efforts for the progress of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and have achieved splendid victories in His Name. They first demonstrated their ability to initiate entry by troops as early as the closing years of the Ten Year Crusade when they enlisted thousands of receptive souls into the ranks of His followers. The sudden influx of new adherents to the Cause from all castes and creeds—clear evidence of the receptivity of that great nation—transformed a small body of believers into a vibrant and broadly based community which gradually learned to shoulder immense and inescapable responsibilities. Its valiant members, relying on the unfailing grace of Bahá'u'lláh, surmounted the obstacles before them, persevered, and sustained their efforts until India came to occupy a privileged place in the eyes of the Bahá'ís of the world.

The Indian Bahá'í community has gone from strength to strength. 218.4 It has established the institutions of the Faith throughout the length and breadth of that vast country, including suitable agencies to administer the affairs of the Cause in each state; has undertaken countless projects and campaigns of expansion and consolidation; has produced and disseminated literature in a wide array of languages; has pursued numerous projects of social and economic development, especially in the field of education; and, aided by the power of attraction of its House of Worship, has proclaimed the Faith to many millions of people. From every standpoint—its administrative structure, its relations with the government, its experience in large-scale expansion, and the devotion of the active supporters of its programs and projects—the Indian community stands in an enviable position at the beginning of this, the Four Year Plan.

The Bahá'í community of Bangladesh, flourishing in the midst of a Muslim society, is a source of joy to the entire Bahá'í world. 218.5 In recent years and

with astonishing rapidity, that community began to achieve extraordinary success in the teaching field, and throughout the Three Year Plan it has sustained consistently large-scale expansion. Its institutions have demonstrated their capacity to mobilize the human resources at their disposal, and those who have responded to the call for action have sacrificially and with the utmost devotion spread the Divine Teachings among the Muslim, Hindu and tribal populations of that country. The purity of their motives and the sincerity of their efforts to address the needs of society have won them recognition from government officials in the highest circles. Their exertions to promote love and unity among the majority Muslim and minority Hindu populations are bearing increasing fruit, a striking testimony to the potency of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

218.6 In the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, the believers have, through the integrity of their character and the excellence of their conduct, overcome in recent years restrictions on the expansion of the Cause. They are now held in high regard and are successfully engaged in presenting the Faith to the people as a unifying force which can contribute to the progress of the nation. As they grow in strength, they can begin to look beyond their own borders and assist in the propagation of the Faith in those areas to which they have such easy access.

218.7 In the Indian Ocean, the Bahá'í community of Sri Lanka, a nation with a predominantly Buddhist population, is addressing diligently the challenges of growth. In spite of a number of setbacks in the past, the friends have persevered and are using the power of their hard-won unity to respond to the needs of that sorely tried country, whose suffering people thirst for the vivifying waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Farther to the east, the Bahá'í community of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has steadily grown over the years and is blessed with sincere and devoted believers, whose efforts won them the distinction of having their own National Spiritual Assembly.

218.8 Dear Friends, the receptivity of your peoples and the extraordinary advances you have already made enable you to approach the challenges of entry by troops with vigor and optimism, and to give systematic attention to the tasks that must be diligently carried out to ensure accelerated growth.

218.9 Your past exploits were largely the result of the incessant labors of a comparatively few consecrated believers who devoted their time and resources to the spread of the Cause in locality after locality. If you are to sustain rapid expansion and consolidation in the coming years, it is imperative that far greater numbers of dedicated and committed souls arise to promote

these twin processes. Training courses—widespread, regular and well-organized—constitute the most effective means to mobilize believers on the scale required. Depending on the conditions of your countries, such courses will be conducted by teachers associated with national, state or regional institutes, some of which may well have several branches. Although the programs of the institutes may vary according to the characteristics of the populations they serve, their essential functions will be the same. They should seek to develop in the participants a good understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's essential Teachings and to help them acquire those skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively. They should also strive to imbue their hearts with a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh—a love from which stems a desire to submit oneself to His Will, to obey His laws, to heed His exhortations and to promote His Faith.

While all the participants in these courses will naturally be directed to the field of teaching, a sufficient number will also have to acquire the ability to assist with the development of local communities. In a region of the world where villages constitute a major component of every nation, a concerted effort must be made to establish in them the patterns of Bahá'í community life on a firm basis. This can only be achieved through perseverance and constancy in working with the local communities. The friends in each locality must be helped to raise their awareness of the efficacy of the Teachings they have accepted and to broaden their vision of the tasks and opportunities before them. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be helped to take up the challenges of community development and of expansion. 218.10

In this respect, we call upon you to give special attention to the advancement of women. In almost all of your region, women have traditionally played a secondary role in the life of society, a condition which is still reflected in many Bahá'í communities. Effective measures have to be adopted to help women take their rightful place in the teaching and administrative fields. By teaching entire families, you can ensure that increasing numbers of women enter the Faith, thereby improving the balance in the composition of your communities and beginning in each family, from the moment of acceptance, a process through which the fundamental principle of the equality between men and women can be realized. 218.11

Of course, your successes in the teaching field and in the development of local communities will only yield lasting results if you ensure the proper education of children and youth. Youth will undoubtedly be the most enthusiastic supporters of the programs of your institutes. They are eager to make 218.12

a significant contribution to the progress of their communities and have shown, time and again, their capacity to respond to the call to service. They can be trained to help shoulder the manifold responsibilities demanded by rapid expansion and consolidation. But it is especially important for large numbers of them to become capable teachers of Bahá'í children's classes. As you are well aware, without the education of children it is impossible to maintain victories from one generation to the next.

218.13 All these tasks will require your concentrated attention. It is important, too, that you maintain the momentum which the activities of social and economic development have gained, especially in India. Within their own sphere of competence, the specialized institutes, the schools and other projects are each engaged in work critical to the development of human resources. We hope that those who benefit from such programs will generously offer their talents to the institutions of the Faith in furthering the interests of the Four Year Plan.

218.14 As you respond to the requirements of the plans soon to be formulated by your institutions, you must ever bear in mind that you will contribute to the central aim of the Four Year Plan only if you teach persistently, prayerfully, lovingly and wisely. You should endeavor to bring into your ranks individuals from every stratum of society as you vigorously advance in the process of entry by troops. Receptive souls should be sought among the affluent and the indigent, in the various circles of urban society and in schools and universities, in centers of industry and commerce and in the vast rural areas of your countries. You should also remember that your exertions are not to be limited to your own home fronts, but that from among you must continue to arise an increasing number of souls to serve as pioneers and traveling teachers in the international field.

218.15 In the coming years, enormous spiritual forces will be acting upon your peoples. You should be confident that your exertions will have a powerful effect on the course of their destinies. Let the words of the Guardian written during the first of the systematic plans to be launched in your region guide your endeavors: "You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of Bahá'u'lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power and arise to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and blessings."²¹⁸⁻¹

218-1. MIS, p. 203.

May the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty be ceaselessly showered upon you, and His All-Powerful Spirit inspire and sustain you throughout the collective enterprise on which you now embark. 218.16

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

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Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Southeast Asia

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam

Dearly loved Friends,

Some four decades ago, in a message to the first Regional Convention of the Bahá'ís of Southeast Asia, the Guardian wrote of the “far-reaching influence” that area would exercise on the “future destinies of the world Bahá'í community.” He referred to the area’s “heterogeneous character” and “geographical position,” underscored “the spiritual receptivity of many of its inhabitants,” and drew attention to “the role they are destined to play in the future shaping of the affairs of mankind.” The remarkable progress of the Faith in Southeast Asia since that time, in a period of social and political upheaval, is but a prelude to the fulfillment of the Guardian’s promise. This, taken together with the recent accomplishments of the believers in the neighboring territories as far north as Mongolia, gives rise to a brilliant vision of future triumphs in the entirety of that vast region. 219.1

You now embark on the next stage of your endeavors, a Four Year Plan whose aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. Among your peoples, the majority of whom have been influenced by noble and high-minded teachings of Buddhism, are many who possess a profound sense of spirituality, which is reflected in the practices of their daily lives and in the quality of their relationships with one another, with nature, and with their social institutions. They have a keen understanding of the need for coherence between the material and the spiritual, and are disturbed by the effects of gross materialism on their societies in recent years. Your region represents a vast reservoir of potential promoters of the Cause waiting to be 219.2

tapped. The number and quality of the active supporters of the Faith with which it is already blessed bespeak the richness of that reservoir.

219.3 Systematic training programs constitute the most potent instrument at your disposal for realizing the potential of that highly promising region to contribute significantly to the human resources of the Faith. To this end, the establishment and strengthening of institutes will undoubtedly be a central component of the plans of all your countries. Your participation in institute programs, through which you will deepen your knowledge of the Faith, cultivate your inner spiritual lives and develop abilities of service, will enable you to intensify your individual and collective exertions in the teaching field and will result in a commensurate acceleration in the expansion of your communities. Varying patterns of growth, of course, will evolve according to the particular conditions in each country.

219.4 In Malaysia, large numbers of believers from among the Chinese, Indian and indigenous populations can be mobilized, and their energies directed towards the stimulation of activity at the local level. Many of the local communities are in a position to implement plans and projects under the direction of their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and they should be encouraged and aided in their efforts to do so. The capacity to achieve rapid and simultaneous expansion and consolidation exists in Malaysia, but needs to be fully exercised. Such an undertaking must be complemented by concrete measures to broaden the range of activities in areas such as the advancement of women, the spread of literacy, and the promotion of moral education—areas in which the Malaysian community already has an impressive record. In addition to contributing to the progress of society, such activities will go far in winning the admiration and respect of the enlightened in government circles and, beyond that, in drawing the attention of leaders of thought throughout the region to the Teachings of the Faith.

219.5 The Bahá'í community of Myanmar, which traces its roots back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, has in recent years been able to pay increasing attention to the expansion of the Faith. The results have been encouraging indeed. The large body of believers in Myanmar, faithful to the Covenant and with hearts filled with love for Bahá'u'lláh, who stand ready to serve His Faith, can be helped by the institute program now being established there to enter the field of teaching with confidence. The effects such an endeavor will have, in a land so receptive to the Divine Message, are incalculable.

219.6 The friends in Thailand may draw courage from the success of their efforts to help reestablish the Bahá'í community of Cambodia and resolve

to turn with the same vigor and determination to the tasks of expansion and consolidation in their homeland. There they have proved themselves capable of teaching among many strata of society and of bringing into their ranks people of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Setting aside all hesitation, and with unity of thought and purpose, let them dedicate the coming four years to the unflinching pursuit of a clearly defined course of action traced for them by their institutions.

In Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where possibilities for growth exist ^{219.7} in varying degrees, the sorely tried, steadfast and devoted friends need to demonstrate to the authorities and leaders of their countries that Bahá'ís, obedient and loyal to their governments, desire but the prosperity of their nations and the upliftment of their peoples. Through the spiritual enrichment of families in Vietnam, through the program of deepening in small groups now initiated in Laos, and through systematic plans for expansion and consolidation and for social and economic development in Cambodia, where the friends enjoy greater freedom, each of these communities can achieve substantial progress within the parameters defined for them by prevailing social and political conditions.

The manner in which the Bahá'í community of Mongolia, so young and ^{219.8} so full of vitality, has taken its affairs in hand is exhilarating. In the span of seven years, the friends have ranged methodically across that vast land and have established the Faith on solid and enduring foundations. At the national level, they are becoming known for their high ideals, particularly as champions of the rights of children. At the same time, their Bahá'í classes, open to children from Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í families alike, are being received with great enthusiasm, presenting them with extensive teaching opportunities. There is a spirit in the Mongolian people which must needs manifest itself in the efflorescence of a numerically strong, vibrant community.

The Bahá'í community of Singapore is energetic and dedicated. ^{219.9} Its past experience demonstrates that focused attention on expansion invariably brings good results. What is required at this stage of the community's development is an accelerating increase in the number of individual enrollments. Such an influx of new souls will continually strengthen the community which, although comparatively small, has demonstrated its ability to play an important role in the affairs of the Faith in the region.

Dear Friends, any attempt to present, no matter how briefly, ^{219.10} an overview of the potentialities of your region must necessarily take into account the preponderating influence that the Chinese people are to exert on the des-

tiny of humankind. To them, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has referred as “truth-seeking” and “prompted with ideal motives.” From among them, He declared, can be raised “such divine personages that each one of them may become the bright candle of the world of humanity.” The progress of the Faith in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the labors of the Chinese believers resident in other parts of the region, are early indications of that which is yet to come. We turn our expectant eyes towards the Chinese people, confident in their ability to become illumined with the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation and to apply His Teachings, with characteristic diligence, to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. As larger and larger numbers become imbued with heavenly qualities, and as they make sincere exertions for the progress of their people, they shall, God willing, win the trust of fair-minded leaders and be able to broaden the scope of their endeavors in a land that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has designated “the country of the future.”

219.11 We shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh may sustain you and guide you in your noble services to His Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

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Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— North America

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in North America: Alaska, Canada, Greenland and the United States

Dearly loved Friends,

220.1 As members of the North American Bahá’í community, you enter the Four Year Plan with a brilliant record of progress in fulfilling the mandate issued by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. In the eight decades since you received this mandate, your prodigious exertions have carried the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to all parts of your continent, and throughout the length and breadth of the planet. You have played a critical role in the establishment of the framework of the Administrative Order and in the sustained proclamation of the Faith. These Tablets launched you on a worldwide enterprise which you, and the generations to succeed you, are called upon to continue during the vast period of time stretching throughout the Formative Age and into the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.

In your pursuit of the provisions of the Four Year Plan on national, regional and local levels, in conformity with the detailed plans to be formulated in the weeks ahead, you should constantly bear in mind the one central aim of the Plan: advancing the process of entry by troops. There can be no doubt that this process, propelled by mysterious spiritual forces beyond the ken of the skeptic, will in due course quicken the souls of a multitude from every background in North America and dramatically increase the numerical strength of your communities. 220.2
220.3

Training institutes and other centers of learning are an indispensable element of a sustained endeavor to advance this process, and to ensure that the essential deepening of new believers is not neglected, that they develop the necessary skills to effectively teach the Faith, and that an opportunity is provided for all Bahá'ís, new and veteran, to embark on a systematic study of the fundamental verities of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. We look to your communities to make an energetic response to the call for such institutes, and to develop a wide variety of approaches fitted to the needs of the diverse components of your population. 220.4

In one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, exhorting the North American believers to strive to attain the exalted station of Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, specifies firmness in the Covenant to be a prerequisite for this achievement.²²⁰⁻¹ We urge you to manifest unwavering adherence to the provisions of the Covenant, while ever striving for a deeper understanding of its challenging features and of its implications, which far transcend the familiar arrangements of present society. 220.5

You are in a most enviable position to provide a mighty impetus to the teaching work. Through the alertness and perseverance of your institutions and the effect of your exertions, there is now a general awareness of, and respect for, the Cause in your region, and the Faith has acquired a reputation for universality and liberality of thought. Well may you rejoice at this remarkable achievement, and well may you contemplate the present needs of the Cause with eagerness and confidence. 220.6

Your accomplishments have prepared the way for even more spectacular successes in the years immediately ahead. Now as never before should you strive mightily to free yourselves from the obstacles of apathy, attachment to worldly pursuits, and lethargy, which stand in the way of so glorious a realization. As the people around you yearn increasingly for a society in which

220-1. See TDP, no. 8.

rectitude of conduct prevails, which is animated by a nobility of moral behavior, and in which the diverse races are firmly united, your challenge is to demonstrate the efficacy of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in ministering to their needs and in recreating the very foundation of individual and social life. The whole of North America stands in desperate need of the inspiring vision, the dynamic sense of purpose and the idealism, which can be provided only by those who are imbued with the spirit and truths of the Bahá'í Writings.

220.7 The community of the Greatest Name must increasingly become renowned for its social cohesion, and for the spirit of trust and confidence which distinguishes the relationship between believers and their institutions. In the earliest years of his ministry, the Guardian stated, “. . . I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centers of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.”²²⁰⁻² Realization of this longing requires that you commit yourselves to the wholehearted support of your institutions. In turn, those of you called upon to serve as members of such bodies should ever be mindful of the attitude and manner prescribed for the conduct of their duties, and should strive continually to approach the exalted standard set out in the Teachings.

220.8 In the Divine Plan bequeathed to you by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is disclosed the glorious destiny of those who are the descendants of the early inhabitants of your continent. We call upon the indigenous believers who are firmly rooted in the Bahá'í Teachings to aid, through both deed and word, those who have not yet attained that level of understanding. Progress along the path to their destiny requires that they refuse to be drawn into the divisiveness and militancy around them, and that they strive to make their own distinctive contribution to the pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, both beyond the confines of North America and at home. They should be ever mindful of the vital contribution they can make to the work of the Faith throughout the American continent, in the circumpolar areas and in the Asian region of the Russian Federation.

220-2. BA, p. 66.

We direct the attention of the believers of African descent, so beloved 220.9
by the Master, to the pressing need for pioneers, who will contribute to
the further development of the Cause in distant areas, including the conti-
nent of Africa for which they were assigned a special responsibility by the
Guardian when the first systematic campaign was launched for its spiritual
illumination. Although their contributions to all aspects of Bahá'í service on
the home front and elsewhere will be of great value, they can be a unique
source of encouragement and inspiration to their African brothers and sis-
ters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of
Bahá'u'lláh.

Increasingly over the years, the Bahá'í community in North America has 220.10
been augmented by the addition of a substantial number of believers who
have come from the Cradle of the Faith. We urge all the friends of Persian
background, who constitute a most valuable source of ability and experi-
ence, to dedicate themselves, to an extent surpassing their past services, to
the accomplishment of the goals of the Four Year Plan, under the leadership
and guidance of the institutions of the Faith in North America. The unity
of thought and endeavor between the friends from East and West will offer a
shining example of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to demolish traditional barriers
and will be a powerful source of attraction to the Cause.

The Alaskan Bahá'ís are privileged to live in an area described by the 220.11
Guardian as “a region destined to play an important role in shaping the
spiritual destinies of the great Republic of the West of which it forms a part,
and to contribute, in no small measure, to the establishment of the institu-
tions of His World Order throughout the American continent.”²²⁰⁻³ The
invaluable contribution they have made to the establishment of the Faith in
Siberia in recent years, together with their significant advances in strength-
ening the home front, provide compelling evidence of their capacity to take
full advantage of the opportunities before them in the Four Year Plan.

The valiant Canadian Bahá'í community was praised by the Guardian for 220.12
“the staunchness of the faith of its members, their unyielding resolve, their
ceaseless efforts, their willingness to sacrifice, their exemplary loyalty, their
steadfast courage,”²²⁰⁻⁴ a description fully confirmed by the record of its
achievements during the Three Year Plan. It has played a disproportionately

220-3. HE, p. 36.

220-4. MC, p. 60.

great and much-appreciated role in the defense of the Faith, in its propagation to all corners of the earth, and in the establishment of its institutions in other lands, both near and far, and is in an enviable position to build upon these successes in the new Plan on which it now embarks.

220.13 Our thoughts turn often to the Bahá'í community of Greenland, whose staunchness of faith and dogged perseverance have won our admiration and praise, and have resulted in the Faith's becoming firmly established in that distant land. Inspired by the promise set out in the Tablets of the Divine Plan that "if the hearts be touched with the heat of the love of God, that territory will become a divine rose-garden and a heavenly paradise, and the souls, even as fruitful trees, will acquire the utmost freshness and beauty,"²²⁰⁻⁵ let them now go forth to claim new victories on the home front and to transform their nation through the power of the Divine Teachings.

220.14 Some four decades ago, Shoghi Effendi described the members of the United States Bahá'í community as "the outstanding protagonists of the Cause of God; the stout-hearted defenders of its integrity, its claims and its rights; the champion-builders of its Administrative Order; the standard-bearers of its crusading hosts; the torchbearers of its embryonic civilization; the chief succorers of the downtrodden, the needy and the fettered among its followers. . . ."²²⁰⁻⁶ Any survey of the distinguished accomplishments of these dearly loved friends during the past three years provides striking evidence of the continuing applicability of this description, and of the immense contribution they are making to the advancement of the Cause. We look to the members of the Bahá'í community in the United States to perform, during the Four Year Plan, heroic deeds of service to the Cause, which will astonish and inspire their fellow-believers throughout the world.

220.15 In North America, there are opportunities for the advancement of the process of entry by troops, the like of which presently exist in no other place on earth. Three unique characteristics combine to give rise to this condition: the unparalleled strength of your local communities, particularly evident in the activity of your Local Spiritual Assemblies and in the consecration of the Bahá'í youth; the positive impression of the Faith which has been conveyed, not only to the generality of the population, but also to leaders of thought and people of influence; and the composition of your nations,

220-5. TDP, no. 5.2.

220-6. CF, pp. 141–42.

which have welcomed to their shores immigrants, students and refugees from all parts of the planet, drawn from all the major racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of humanity. You, who live in a continent described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, the home of the righteous, and the gathering-place of the free,”²²⁰⁻⁷ are called upon to take full advantage of these favorable circumstances.

Dear Friends, now must you commit yourselves to the work of the Cause 220.16 afresh, liberated from any doubts, uncertainties or hesitations which may have impeded you in the past. Every stratum of society must be brought within your embrace, as you vigorously advance toward the goal of entry by troops at this time when powerful spiritual forces are at work in the hearts of the people. Neither the affluent nor the indigent should be excluded from your purview. Receptive souls should be sought in the sophisticated circles of urban society, on the campuses of colleges and universities, in centers of industry and commerce, on the farms and villages of the mountains, plains and prairies—wherever are to be found human beings in search of the divine Truth. You should strive to create a Bahá’í community which will offer to the entire world a vibrant model of unity in diversity. The influence of your exertions can extend well beyond the confines of North America; in particular, French Canadian believers can perform an invaluable service to the Faith in the French-speaking nations and islands throughout the world, the Bahá’ís dwelling in the Arctic and subarctic regions can powerfully reinforce the work of the Cause in the circumpolar areas, and the friends of Hispanic background have fertile fields before them throughout Latin America. Let all believers consider the extent to which they can use familial and ethnic ties to other regions of the world for the fulfillment of the global mission conferred on the recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

At this critical hour in the fortunes of humanity, our eyes turn with 220.17 eagerness and hope to the Bahá’ís of all parts of North America, who constitute a reservoir of human and material resources unmatched elsewhere in the Bahá’í world. As you proceed along your prescribed path, you should be ever mindful of these words addressed to you by the Author of the Tablets of the Divine Plan: “I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements. The hope

220-7. TDP, no. 9.3.

which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cherishes for you is that the same success which has attended your efforts in America may crown your endeavors in other parts of the world, that through you the fame of the Cause of God may be diffused throughout the East and the West, and the advent of the Kingdom of the Lord of Hosts be proclaimed in all the five continents of the globe.²²⁰⁻⁸

^{220.18} Our ardent prayers at the Sacred Threshold will surround and accompany you at every step of the momentous undertaking to which you are now summoned.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

221

Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Europe

RIDVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Europe

^{221.1} Dearly loved Friends,

Forty-three years ago, when the European Bahá’ís gathered at the conference in Stockholm called by the beloved Guardian for the launching of the mighty Ten Year Crusade in your continent, you had but three National Spiritual Assemblies—those of the British Isles, of Germany and Austria, and of Italy and Switzerland—together with slowly developing local communities in the other countries of western Europe. In the east, cut off by political barriers, were tiny remnants of communities which had been raised up in earlier years and, in neighboring Turkey, was a small, struggling national community. As the European believers of that time contemplated the awe-inspiring tasks before them, they heard the words of the Guardian, illuminating the historical significance of the continent in which they were to build the institutions of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Order:

^{221.1a} A continent, occupying such a central and strategic position on the entire planet; so rich and eventful in its history, so diversified in its culture; from whose soil sprang both the Hellenic and Roman civilizations; the mainspring of a civilization to some of whose features Bahá’u’lláh Himself paid tribute; on whose southern shores Chris-

220-8. TDP, no. 74.

tendom first established its home; along whose eastern marches the mighty forces of the Cross and the Crescent so frequently clashed; on whose southwestern extremity a fast-evolving Islamic culture yielded its fairest fruit; in whose heart the light of the Reformation shone so brightly, shedding its rays as far as the outlying regions of the globe.

...²²¹⁻¹

This, your continent, whose soil was blessed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, which was twice visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His epoch-making journeys following His release from imprisonment, whose travelers and scholars early responded to the dawning light of the Bábí Revelation, two of whose governments extended the hand of succor during the Heroic Age of the Faith, and whose nations, in recent years, have intervened so effectively in defense of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran, has amply demonstrated the capacity of its people to rally to the banner of the Cause of God, once their hearts are touched and their minds awakened to its Message.

In the course of these forty-three years the European Bahá'í communities have shown great vitality. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies has risen to thirty-four, covering the entire continent and embracing, in the case of Russia, vast territories as far as the Pacific Ocean. Great victories have been won for the Faith by European pioneers in Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean region and Greenland. Your institutions have distinguished themselves in external affairs. Your communities include outstanding scholars of the Faith, musicians, artists, scientists and those concerned with the application of Bahá'í Teachings to economics and business. You have exerted special efforts for the advancement of women and the strengthening of family life. The European Bahá'í Youth Council provides a focal point and a source of stimulation to the youth in all parts of Europe, complemented by a network of National and Local Youth Committees closely linked to and supported by their National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now is the time to build on these achievements, clearly focusing all efforts on the central purpose of taking the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to a spiritually famished population.

The first task of your National Spiritual Assemblies immediately after Ridván will be to formulate, in consultation with the Counselors, the details

221-1. UD, p. 319.

of the Four Year Plan, country by country. The participation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers in evolving their own local plans, and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be essential for the successful achievement of the high aims of this stage of the implementation of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

221.5 Europe is a continent of great variety, and each of your National Assemblies will be studying with care the processes and achievements required for the advancement of the Cause of God in its area during the coming four years. Each must consider the current condition of its community, the territory within which it is working, and areas of potential collaboration with other Bahá’í communities. Special attention will need to be paid to the attainment of official recognition in those countries where the institutions of the Faith are not yet legally incorporated, and to raising up National Spiritual Assemblies in certain of those independent countries and major islands, such as the Faroese, which have not yet attained them. There are, however, certain elements of an even wider vision which must be considered as they apply to specific countries, groups of countries and the entire continent.

221.6 There are areas which cry out for pioneers and traveling teachers; the mind turns, for example, to the work among the Sami and the other peoples of the Arctic and subarctic areas as far north as Spitsbergen. We contemplate the significance of teaching the Faith in the islands of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the North Sea; the continent-wide importance of the Romany peoples, who have begun to show such receptivity to the call of Bahá’u’lláh; the opportunity for the European Bahá’í communities to demonstrate the salutary nature of the Teachings in relation to minorities of every kind; the specific tasks described by the beloved Guardian as the destiny of certain communities, and their responsibilities in far-flung lands where their languages are spoken; the implications of the advancement of the Faith in Italy where is to be found “the heart and stronghold of the leading, the most ancient and powerful Church of Christendom”; the need to rapidly increase the number of Bahá’í centers in the vast areas of the Ukraine and European Russia; and, beyond this, the special responsibilities and opportunities of the Bahá’í community of the Russian Federation, the larger part of whose area lies in Asia and must continue to benefit from collaboration with neighboring communities of central, southern and eastern Asia as well as Alaska, Canada and the United States. All these are but some examples of the challenges which you face in the years ahead.

The central aim of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is of especial significance for Europe. You should have no misgivings—it is a process that can advance in all parts of Europe, in the west as well as in the east. All should recognize that entry by troops is an inevitable stage in the development of the Cause. The nature of the process is clarified in the compilation on the subject,²²¹⁻² whence it becomes apparent that the desired outcome, a sustained entry by troops, cannot be achieved by a mere series of spasmodic, uncoordinated exertions, no matter how enthusiastic. Confidence; unity of vision; systematic, realistic, but audacious planning; acceptance of the fact that mistakes will be made, and willingness to learn from these mistakes; and, above all, reliance on the guidance and sustaining confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh will advance this process. 221.7

The establishment of training institutes in various locations is emphasized in the Four Year Plan because current methods, valuable though they are, are not adequate by themselves to meet the challenges of this new stage in the growth of the Cause. The character and structure of the training institutes must be adapted to the conditions of each country and region; clearly their form in Europe will not be identical with that of training institutes in the rural areas of India. Their essential functions, however, will be the same. They will foster a firm acceptance of Bahá'í identity in those who take part: the capacity to look upon the world and its conditions from the point of view of the Teachings rather than from the standpoint of one's nationality or non-Bahá'í background. They will help to develop in each participant a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, a good understanding of His essential Teachings and an awareness of the importance of developing the spiritual life of each individual through prayer, meditation and immersion in the Sacred Writings. They will also cover such practical matters as how to teach the Faith, for there are too many who, for lack of confidence in their ability to do so, are hesitant to convey the Message. The transformation that such deepening in the Faith produces will surely inflame the hearts of the individual friends with the longing to share this Message with those around them, and this is the seed of all success in teaching. Those who have attended training institutes will be able to help the other Bahá'ís, new and old, to increase 221.8

221-2. See CC 3, pp. 154–203.

their potential for teaching, and so to greatly increase the human resources of the Cause, in which every believer is a teacher.

221.9 The teaching of the Faith by the friends in Europe must increase in range; it must be varied, spontaneous and individual on the one hand, and focused, united and mutually supportive on the other. It must be both inspiring and practical and must, above all, be informed with serene faith in the power of Bahá'u'lláh. You should widen the field of your teaching work to include the country people and the masses laboring in the cities; people of little education as well as intellectuals in university towns. You should consciously approach every stratum of society, adapting your methods, literature and audiovisual materials to each audience. Both the heart and the mind need to be fed; both spiritual force and intellectual clarity must be recognized as vital elements of the teaching work. You have excelled in the use of the arts for the proclamation, expansion and consolidation of the Faith; this is a key to opening many doors and should be encouraged and developed. Your unity, enthusiasm, confidence and perseverance, strengthened and guided by the power of prayer, cannot fail to act as a channel for divine confirmations, which will be a magnet to seeking souls.

221.10 For our part, we shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that you, who have won such historic victories in your homelands and throughout the world, will enter during the Four Year Plan into a stage of even greater achievement, presaging the as yet unimaginable glories destined to unfold during the twenty-first century.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

222

Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Africa

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Africa

Dearly loved Friends,

222.1 You come to the Four Year Plan with an extraordinary history of achievement, which indicates that you are well equipped spiritually and administratively, and in the inherent potential of your people, to respond successfully to the Plan's central aim to advance the process of entry by troops. In whatever direction south of the Sahara one may look—whether to the

eastern, western, central or southern region of the continent—portents of great, imminent expansion are evident. The torch of faith burns brightly in your hearts, setting our spirits aglow with gladness at the scale of your attainments and the magnificent possibilities that are now yours.

The bright hope inspired by such observations is justified by thrilling ^{222.2} facts. The spiritual endowments of Africa derive naturally from the creative forces universally released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, but these have been marvelously enhanced by the continent's direct associations with the Channels of such forces: the ship transporting the Blessed Beauty on His exile to the Holy Land touched briefly its northern shores; the Center of the Covenant spent extended periods in Egypt before and after His historic visit to the West. The continent was also twice crossed from south to north by the beloved Guardian. Bahá'u'lláh favored the black peoples by making a specific reference to them when, as the Master testified, He compared them to the “black pupil of the eye” through which “the light of the spirit shineth forth.”²²²⁻¹

African Bahá'í history had its beginnings in Egypt, which was opened ^{222.3} to the Faith during the period of the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh; it gathered momentum during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá when Bahá'í localities were established in South Africa and Tunisia. But the early effects of these spiritual endowments became more obvious with the remarkable success of the two-year Africa Project (1951–53) when 16 territories were opened, bringing to 25 the total number of countries and islands in which Bahá'ís resided; this preceded the opening of the 33 virgin territories called for in the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Global Crusade, a period of astonishing development in Africa that evoked the admiration and praise of Shoghi Effendi as many people from different tribes entered the Cause, a number of administrative institutions were formed, and it became possible to raise up the Mother Temple of Africa in the heart of the continent. During the course of these rapid developments, the African believers themselves, through sacrificial effort as teachers and pioneers, arose to champion the Cause of God, manifesting the profundity of their response to the Message of the New Day.

In the countries lying to the north where programs of public teaching ^{222.4} cannot now be pursued, the friends have continued for many years to maintain their posts with circumspection and heroic fortitude. Not only

222-1. ABL, p. 68.

have they kept the flame of faith alive in their hearts, they also endeavor to transmit the fire of the love of God to members of their families, including their children and youth, in anticipation of the day when freedom to openly proclaim their religion and conduct their community affairs is secured.

222.5 With immense gratification we now look back over just a few decades during which Africa attained the largest number of National Spiritual Assemblies of any continent; moreover, Africa's Local Spiritual Assemblies amount to a substantial percentage of the world's total. The prodigious output of energy devoted to expansion and consolidation has included major endeavors to train the believers and to mount and maintain development projects. As a result the African Bahá'í community can boast of notable progress in the establishment of a number of primary and secondary schools and training institutes. A source of much of this energy in recent times has been the African youth, who have increasingly demonstrated exemplary dedication and vigor in their Bahá'í activities. In the field of external affairs, the African community, whether in small or large states, has shown a boldness, a creativity, and a tenacity that have resonated in the worldwide proclamation of the Faith and the promotion of its vital interests.

222.6 Clearly, then, Africa is poised to register a victory for the Cause that will reaffirm its position among the front ranks of our world community. The time is critical, and you must act promptly to realize this prospect. We therefore urge our African brothers and sisters to take immediate account of their strengths, needs and opportunities, and then resolve to turn the challenge posed by these conditions into the means of success. You will of necessity give concentrated attention to various plans and programs of activity if you are to advance to new stages of entry by troops, but simultaneously certain underlying requisites will claim your special vigilance and exertion. These are the elimination of tribal prejudice, the transformation of prevailing social practices, and the fostering of education.

222.7 Tribal conflict is one of the most pressing issues facing Africa. This must be dealt with in the heart of every faithful follower of Bahá'u'lláh and resolutely overcome through the collective will of every local and national Bahá'í community. Indeed, how can the lovers of the Blessed Beauty allow tribal prejudice and rivalry to be practiced in their midst when He has made unity the pivotal principle and goal of His Faith? Hatred and animosity based on tribe, like those based on race, blight the human spirit and arrest the development of the society that accommodates them. If outside the Bahá'í community in recent years influential persons and public officials have been

able to see the practical benefit of bringing diverse groups together towards unity, how much more should it be possible for those imbued with the spirit of our Teachings to strive to eliminate within the Bahá'í fellowship the unsavory characteristics of tribal division and disunity. It is imperative and urgent in the current state of society for the Bahá'ís so to practice genuine unity among themselves and in their relations to others that they may become renowned as a new people in the eyes of all Africans. Such a demonstration will attract divine confirmations and greatly reinforce their power to succeed in spreading the Teachings.

Much of what distinguishes African life is to be found in patterns of behavior displayed in the tribe and particularly in the family. Increasingly, urban life threatens to destroy the positive qualities of such patterns. Since change is inevitable if progress is to be made by any African society, a primary challenge to Bahá'ís is to preserve and improve those wholesome aspects of tribal and family custom that are in accord with the Bahá'í Teachings and to dispense with those that are not. Such a challenge must be embraced with the understanding that the Book of God is the standard by which to weigh all forms of behavior. While unwavering action is necessary, wisdom and tact and patience must, of course, be exercised. Let it be understood, too, that Africans are not alone in the struggle to change certain age-old practices. People everywhere have customs which must be abandoned so as to clear the path along which their societies must evolve towards that glorious, new civilization which is to be the fruit of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation. Indeed, in no society on earth can there be found practices which adequately mirror the standards of His Cause. His own truth-bearing Words clarify the matter: "The summons and the message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty. The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God's Revelation."²²²⁻²

The acute inadequacy of plans and programs to educate Africa's people poses a particular challenge to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that continent, for He has emphasized the importance of education for all; and individuals ought to be taught at least to read and write. The education of which

222-2. TB, p. 89.

Bahá'u'lláh spoke includes both spiritual and material aspects. The lack of such education affects the ability of people to achieve true progress. This matter should be of the keenest interest to all segments of the community. Parents have a special responsibility to see that their children, both boys and girls, receive an education; and they must take care that the girls are not left behind, since well-educated girls are a guarantee of the excellence of future society; indeed, preference should, if necessary, be given to their education. Closely linked to this concern is the principle of the equality of men and women taught by Bahá'u'lláh. It is also highly desirable for adults, both men and women, who are illiterate to participate in literacy programs, so that gradually all Bahá'ís will be able to read the Word of God for themselves. The Bahá'í community is not fully equipped to undertake what responsible authorities have neglected to do for the education of the people; however, the Bahá'í institutions at all levels are urged to give attention to these critical needs, as circumstances permit.

222.10 Bearing in mind these three foregoing considerations, you can move vigorously and wisely to tackle the manifold tasks implied by the Plan's emphasis on advancing the process of entry by troops. An extension of your efforts to effect both expansion and consolidation on a wholly new scale is imperative. The one suggests a powerful outward thrust of your teaching activities to cover the length and breadth of your countries, reaching the remotest areas with the Divine Message. The other indicates a drive to consolidate and multiply your gains through an ever-deepening penetration of spiritual knowledge of the Faith into the hearts of the believers, a systematic development of human resources, and a marked improvement in the functioning of your national and, particularly, your local institutions.

222.11 In all this exertion, the three components of the process—the individual, the institutions and the community—must assume their respective responsibilities. We especially expect you all to pursue every means at your disposal that will bring about the realization of an organic unity between the Local Spiritual Assembly and the community, and thereby establish a sharp contrast to the fragmentation of present-day social life. Thus, we long to see the individual African believers arise in greater numbers to claim the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as their own and to take on the requisite tasks of teaching and administering a rapidly expanding Faith. And we look for accumulating evidence that the Spiritual Assemblies are taking to heart their God-given mandate and are conscientiously fulfilling their obligations to Bahá'u'lláh to foster the growth and development of vibrant communities in which adults,

youth and children are more and more integrated and active. To fulfill these expectations is to demonstrate to a skeptical world the power of the Faith to hold aloft a new standard for the guidance of the nations, and eventually to attract the disillusioned masses to the security of God's Faith.

What specific actions, you may well ask, would indicate that you are fulfilling the basic requirement of the Plan in Africa? A reply would include mention of the following. Whatever the state of expansion in a community, take the next steps to increase enrollments, deepen the believers and strengthen the teaching force. Where entry by troops is in progress, intensify your efforts to stimulate further increase in the number of believers, while at the same time conducting a program of training that will deepen the new believers and raise up new teachers on a continuing basis. Maximize action to bring families into the Faith by encouraging individuals in their duty to endeavor to lead as many of their family members as possible to the light of divine guidance. Regularize efforts to teach among the sub-Saharan Muslims. Proliferate the publication of Bahá'í literature and audiocassette tapes, especially in vernacular languages. Swell the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies elected by their communities without help from outside. Support more abundantly the Funds of the Faith. Orient believers from among the traditional rulers to the Teachings, so that they will find appropriate ways to serve the Faith. 222.12

Moreover, extend provisions for children regularly to attend Bahá'í classes for their spiritual training. Give consistent attention to involving the youth in the expansion and consolidation work and to opening channels of activity suited to their talents and necessary for their development into mature Bahá'ís. Increase the number and effectiveness of observances of Nineteen Day Feasts. Expand the use of music and drama in the proclamation and teaching work, an effort in which Africa has already distinguished itself. Multiply plans and programs to raise the status of women and to encourage the active support of men in such endeavors. Extend the range of your exertions in the fields of external affairs and social and economic development. 222.13

You will readily appreciate, then, the emphasis placed on multiplying the number of training institutes; for without them it will be impossible to meet the needs of hugely expanding communities. In some places, the friends may find it possible to offer sites and facilities for these essential operations, which must be located in as many areas as necessary to provide regular and well-organized training to increasing numbers of believers. The programs of the institutes must be designed to instill in the participants a good under- 222.14

standing of the fundamental verities of the Faith and to help them acquire skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively.

222.15 Immediately after Riḍván your National Spiritual Assemblies will initiate efforts to formulate, in consultation with the Counselors, the details of the Four Year Plan, country by country. To ensure that the Plan is broadly based and responsive to the needs of all areas of a country, the participation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals, in evolving their own local plans and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be essential.

222.16 Dear Friends, we are acutely conscious of the crushing difficulties that afflict life in Africa: the conditions that have caused a flood of refugees on the continent, the horrors created by ethnic conflict, the political unrest, the economic distress, the high incidence of hunger and disease, the horrendous natural disasters. But, paradoxical as it may seem, there exist in all of these the very possibilities of your success. Your ability to endure and forge ahead is reinforced in the assurance given by the Divine Physician, Who anticipated all these conditions and prescribed a sure remedy. His prescriptions have been placed in your hands.

222.17 Therefore, we remind you of the noble ambitions the beloved Guardian held for you as a people in a continent that has “a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization.” May such memories resound afresh in your hearts, quickening your will to fulfill the major aim of the Plan before you, and setting a pace for your actions like the urgent rhythm of drums pulsating throughout your immensely potent, far-stretching land.

222.18 Our ardent prayer at the Holy Threshold on your behalf is that the divine storehouses of heaven may pour out their bounties upon you all, healing your ills, magnifying your powers, and enabling you to achieve victory upon victory.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

223

Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Western and Central Asia

RİDVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Western and Central Asia

Dearly loved Friends,

As a turbulent yet luminous century draws to a close, the Bahá'í community is embarking on another campaign in the progressive unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The global enterprises thus far executed by the consecrated adherents of His Cause have systematically spread the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to every corner of the earth and have firmly established the institutions of His Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan, whose primary aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is being launched at a time when the Cause of God has emerged from obscurity, when its contributions to society are being increasingly acknowledged, and when humanity's prolonged and continuous suffering has created an atmosphere of search for spiritual values and has raised the level of receptivity to the Cause. 223.1

We call upon our much-loved coworkers in the western and central parts of the Asiatic continent, the home of the oldest and most venerable Bahá'í communities, to rally round their divinely ordained institutions and to arise during these years to demonstrate once again the devotion, valor and determination which have already conferred matchless distinction upon them. You have the honor of serving the Faith in a region above whose horizon the dawn of the Great Day of the Lord appeared, in whose bosom the infant Cause of God was nurtured, on whose soil so much sacred blood was shed, on whose western shores the Qiblih of the people of Bahá is established, within whose embrace the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was raised, and from which hosts of devoted and committed Bahá'ís have, in the past decades, set out to bear the banner of the Faith to every part of the globe. 223.2

Our thoughts turn first to the community of Bahá'u'lláh's lovers in the land where His Faith was born. Although they are still denied the freedom to resume direct participation in the series of campaigns by which the Cause is steadily advancing throughout the world, their achievements constitute irrefutable proof of the creative power of the daily sacrifices they are making for the vindication of the Faith. What is becoming apparent, as this new global Plan opens, is that the build-up of spiritual strength within the 223.3

Iranian Bahá'í community—purified by suffering and steeled by adversity—represents a reservoir of energy that will, in God's good time, bring incalculable benefits to the Cause. "Say: The springs that sustain the life of these birds are not of this world. Their source is far above the reach and ken of human apprehension."²²³⁻¹

223.4 In the lands to the south and west of Iran, Bahá'ís live under restrictions which prevent them from teaching the Cause to their fellow-countrymen. Yet, by the outstanding contributions they have made to the progress of the Faith in other parts of the world, they have proved that their enthusiasm to spread the Divine Message cannot be dampened. It has been particularly heartening to witness the eagerness and rapidity with which, as soon as the barriers to teaching in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus were removed, they rushed to the aid of the small bands of believers who had persevered there for so many decades and helped them to build the vibrant communities now flourishing in these regions today. No doubt they will continue to lend valuable assistance to the communities in Central Asia and the Caucasus during the Four Year Plan.

223.5 In these republics, through the combined efforts of native and visiting teachers, extraordinary advances can be expected. A pattern for the rapid growth of the Cause has already been established in the region: locality after locality has been opened to the Faith and, because of the high receptivity of the people, the number of believers in each place has quickly risen, resulting in the election of a Spiritual Assembly to guide the affairs of the nascent community. Integral to this pattern, almost from the very outset, has been the holding of regular institute courses, which have assisted the friends in becoming strong promoters of the Cause. If the expansion and consolidation activities are vigorously pursued according to this same pattern in the coming years, the growth of the Faith will accelerate, greatly increasing the number of believers and centers.

223.6 To effect such accelerated growth, the friends in these countries must become so deepened in their understanding of the Faith as to take up, on their own initiative, the torch of guidance that will enlighten the multitudes. They should not be content with small communities, nor allow the tasks of administering their own community affairs to divert them from the essential purpose of bringing new members into their ranks. Each community, from

223-1. *GWB*, no. 163.2.

the earliest phases of its development, should be fired by a vision of the glory of the Cause and imbued with the zeal to achieve rapid and sustained expansion both in the locality itself and in the nearby towns and villages.

In Pakistan, where a well-grounded community traces its roots back ^{223.7} some hundred years, the friends must make a mighty effort to increase their numbers significantly among people of every walk of life. The will and determination needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation can be created through a consistent and widespread institute program aimed at exposing growing contingents of believers to the Creative Word, thus enhancing their spiritual capacities to diffuse the light of the Faith and to further the development of its institutions. Such a rapid process of growth requires that more and more women be enabled to move to the forefront of Bahá'í activity, in both the teaching and administrative fields. While rising to the challenge of entry by troops in their homeland, the friends in Pakistan need also to pay special attention to their long-suffering Afghan neighbors, who cry out for the Healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh, the one true balm for their afflictions.

In all your countries, you must continue to give the highest priority ^{223.8} to the education of children. Having seen the effects of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on generation after generation, you well understand the value of Bahá'í education and of a proper spiritual upbringing. In those areas where activities are restricted, you are nevertheless able to teach the children of your own communities and help them to grow to become pillars of strength. In other areas, you have the possibility, nay the obligation, to open your classes to children of non-Bahá'í families and to become known as the educators of the coming generations of your peoples.

Dear Friends, the time is short, and weighty responsibilities have been ^{223.9} placed on the shoulders of each and every Bahá'í. In His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Blessed Beauty states:

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and will aid who- ^{223.9a} soever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.²²³⁻²

223-2. KA, ¶53.

223.10 Be confident that your dedicated services will, like a magnet, attract the promised confirmations and that your hearts will be gladdened as you witness the successive triumphs of the Cause you hold so dear. We shall remember all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá'u'lláh to guide and assist you, as you face the many challenges of these spiritually potent closing years of the century.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

224

Supplementary Message—Riḍván Message 1996— Pacific Region

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Australia, the Cook Islands, the Eastern Caroline Islands, the Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, the Hawaiian Islands, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Korea, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Western Caroline Islands

Dearly loved Friends,

224.1 You are privileged to live in a region of the world unique in the opportunities it offers to advance the interests of the Faith during the course of the Four Year Plan. You constitute Bahá'í communities within, or on the fringe of, the vast Pacific Ocean, with which is associated this promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost part of the ocean and, raising His voice proclaim: 'I am the life-giver of the world.'"²²⁴⁻¹ At a time when the dear Bahá'í friends in the Cradle of the Faith yearn for the yoke of oppression to be lifted from their shoulders, you can compensate for their present and temporary inability to propagate the Faith if you undertake a sustained endeavor to convey the Divine Message to the peoples of your countries and multiply Bahá'í institutions throughout these lands.

224.2 Within your region is to be found a vast diversity of races, cultures, languages and religious traditions, illustrative of the major influences which

224-1. WOB, p. 78.

have shaped the affairs of humanity throughout history. One of this region's distinguishing features is described by the Guardian as "a spiritual axis, extending from the Antipodes to the northern islands of the Pacific Ocean—an axis whose northern and southern poles will act as powerful magnets, endowed with exceptional spiritual potency, and towards which other younger and less experienced communities will tend for some time to gravitate."²²⁴⁻² This emphasizes the vital role to be played by the Bahá'í communities of Northeastern Asia and of the Antipodes in the spiritual illumination of the surrounding areas.

Every country of the region must witness, in the course of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It is essential that the plans formulated on national and local levels reflect this vital aim. The advancement of this process will require that greater attention be given not only to fostering individual initiative in the teaching work, but also to developing human resources through the establishment and efficient operation of training institutes and other centers of learning, and to vastly increasing the strength and quality of the functioning of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. 224.3

We direct a special appeal to the indigenous believers in all parts of the Pacific region, men and women alike, to intensify their efforts to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and to strive for a position in the forefront of the promoters of the Faith through their teaching endeavors on the home front and their international cooperation in programs of the Ocean of Light. As the tensions and divisions of a declining social order increase, the believers throughout the Pacific Islands should provide compelling testimony to the potency of the Bahá'í Teachings through their manifest unity transcending tribal, national or ethnic barriers. The desperate search for solutions to the social and economic problems afflicting these countries is tempting people, in increasing numbers, to indulge in partisan political activities; the indigenous Bahá'ís should refuse to be drawn into such divisive pursuits and should strive to acquire a more profound insight into the nature of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which offers a pattern for a future society distinguished by justice and unity, far removed from the contention of competing political interests. 224.4

In many of the nations of your area, women have traditionally been restricted to a secondary role in the life of society. We call upon the 224.5

224-2. JTA, p. 89.

Bahá'í women of these countries, assured of the support and encouragement of all elements of the Bahá'í community, to demonstrate the transforming power of this Revelation by their courage and initiative in the teaching work and their full participation in the administrative activities of the Faith.

224.6 In much of the region, insufficient attention has been given to the education of children. Far more extensive programs should be initiated in those countries where the need exists, to ensure that Bahá'í children are nurtured, encouraged to acquire trained minds, illumined with a sound knowledge of the Divine Teachings, well-equipped to participate in the work of the Cause at all levels and to contribute to the arts, crafts and sciences necessary for the advancement of civilization. Such programs, when open to all children, Bahá'í or not, offer a potent means of extending the beneficial influences of Bahá'u'lláh's Message to the wider society.

224.7 In Northeastern Asia, the progress of the Faith has been most encouraging, and a good foundation has been laid for the Bahá'ís of Japan and Korea to magnify the size of their communities substantially during the Four Year Plan, while making a notable contribution to the work of the Faith in neighboring countries. Special attention should be given to the development of the Faith in the Ryukyu Islands and also to the exploration of any opportunities which might arise to carry the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all parts of the Korean peninsula.

224.8 The dedication and vitality of the Bahá'í community in the Philippine Islands is a constant source of joy to us. We look to the Filipino believers to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops during the Four Year Plan, while giving renewed attention to the strengthening of their Local Spiritual Assemblies and the development of community life. This will necessitate the intensive use of training institutes throughout the country, and the involvement of a larger number of believers in these training programs. The members of this devoted Bahá'í community provide a welcome source of manpower for the reinforcement of Bahá'í endeavors elsewhere, particularly in the Asian and Pacific regions.

224.9 We are well aware of the restrictions which have long afflicted the members of the Indonesian Bahá'í community. Their staunchness of faith, and their initiative in taking full advantage of whatever opportunities are open to them, attract our admiration and gratitude. We urge them to continue their endeavors throughout the whole of Indonesia, with full confidence that their hopes will be fulfilled in the future.

A special responsibility must rest upon the believers in Papua New Guinea, 224.10 constituting the largest body of Bahá'ís in Australasia, to strive unceasingly to build a vibrant community which embraces all strata of society and which is renowned as a dynamic and enlightened segment of their nation. We look forward, in the course of the Four Year Plan, to a greater participation of the Bahá'í men and women of this country in the development of the Faith in other parts of Melanesia and elsewhere throughout the Pacific Islands.

In Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, there are well-established and 224.11 soundly functioning Bahá'í communities, each characterized by an admirable record of accomplishments on the home front and by a notable contribution to the work of the Faith in other parts of the Pacific and beyond. We call upon the believers in these countries to strive for a fuller realization of their duty to advance the interests of the Faith on the home fronts and throughout the length and breadth of the Pacific region. In their own countries, they should aspire to far greater attainments, marked by a substantial increase in the number of adherents and an enhanced public awareness of the distinctive character of the Bahá'í Faith and its followers. They can render invaluable assistance to other Bahá'í communities, not only in the Pacific region but in Southeast Asia and beyond, because of the experience they have acquired in the teaching and administrative fields and the resources to which they have access. The believers from the Pacific Islands who have taken up residence in these three countries should be mindful of the responsibilities which rest upon them to devise means by which they can contribute to the strengthening of the Bahá'í communities in the island nations from which they have come.

Many of the valiant Bahá'í communities of the Pacific Islands are dis- 224.12 tinguished by the fact that they constitute significant percentages of the populations of their countries. The believers in these island nations need to direct their attention, more than ever, to the propagation of the Faith. They should also concentrate on the development of a distinctive community life, based on an uncompromising adherence to the precepts of the Faith, and guided by well-functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies, which will demonstrate to the entire populations of their countries the unifying and transforming power of the Faith, and will attract to the Cause a multitude of new believers. Through this effort, they can make a vital contribution to enhancing the worldwide prestige of the Faith, and can lay the foundation for even more outstanding victories in the future. We urge them to give attention to sharply increasing their level of international cooperation in

pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, including support of the establishment of a strong Bahá'í community in French Polynesia as a basis for the future election of a National Spiritual Assembly there.

224.13 Almost four decades have passed since Shoghi Effendi described the Pacific region in which you live as “that vast area of the globe, an area endowed with unimaginable potentialities, and which, owing to its strategic position, is bound to feel the impact of world-shaking forces, and to shape to a marked degree through the experience gained by its peoples in the school of adversity, the destinies of mankind.”²²⁴⁻³ Since that time your nations have come ever more fully under the influence of the forces which are causing turmoil and disorder to human society, while the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have labored, undeterred and with admirable dedication, to advance the Cause of their Lord and to establish His institutions. The Pacific area, where, as the Guardian stated, “Bahá'í exploits bid fair to outshine the feats achieved in any other ocean, and indeed in every continent of the globe. . . ,”²²⁴⁻⁴ now stands at the threshold of victories far greater than any yet won. We call upon you to go forward now as never before, assured of our ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, confident of your ultimate triumph.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

225

Our Sacred Duty to Teach the Faith and the Role of the Institutions

22 APRIL 1996

To an individual believer

225.1 Your email message . . . has been received at the Bahá'í World Center, and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to reply as follows to your question regarding teaching the Faith. . . .

225.2 In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh states clearly the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are reiterated and amplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. They can be summarized briefly as prayer and meditation, the endeavor to conform one's behavior to the exalted standard set

224-3. LGANZ, p. 138.

224-4. MBW, p. 111.

forth in the Bahá'í Teachings, participation in the life of the Bahá'í community, teaching the Faith and contributing to the Bahá'í Fund. Different individuals, according to their natures, will follow these paths in varying ways, but all are essential to spiritual growth. The House of Justice points out that there can be no rigid formula on how to attain the right balance in our approach to spirituality, and that the best course here, as in so many things, is to follow the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Regarding, in particular, teaching the Cause of God, from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, we are reminded that it is a sacred obligation enjoined upon every believer. 225.3

Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined upon the Bahá'ís the sacred obligation of teaching. We have no priests, therefore the service once rendered by priests to their religions is the service every single Bahá'í is expected to render individually to his religion. He must be the one who enlightens new souls, confirms them, heals the wounded and the weary upon the road of life, and gives them to quaff from the chalice of everlasting life—the knowledge of the Manifestation of God in His Day. 225.4

Further, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to “Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call ‘Verily, there is no God but me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained’ to be raised therefrom.” 225.5

While living the Bahá'í life, good works and service to our fellow men are important aspects in exemplifying and promoting the Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes that these alone are not sufficient. He states: 225.6

It is at such times that the friends of God avail themselves of the occasion, seize the opportunity, rush forth and win the prize. If their task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, nothing will be accomplished. They must speak out, expound the proofs, set forth clear arguments, draw irrefutable conclusions establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality.²²⁵⁻¹ 225.6a

The relevant guidance provided in messages and letters from the House of Justice can best be understood in light of the knowledge that teaching the Faith is each individual's sacred duty, prescribed by God, and is

225-1. SWAB, no. 212.

fundamental for the advancement of the Cause and our own spiritual progress. In its 1995 *Riḍván* message, the House of Justice wrote, “For to teach, Bahá’u’lláh Himself affirms, is to do the ‘most meritorious of all deeds.’” In another *Riḍván* message, teaching is described as “the food of the spirit . . . 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.”²²⁵⁻² The emphasis on teaching which you perceive in these messages in no way diminishes the importance of the other requisites for spiritual growth, but rather should inspire the believers to submerge themselves yet deeper in prayer, meditation and study of the Word of God, and to strive more vigilantly to live the Bahá’í life and to be of service to their fellow man, as essential requirements to fulfilling their obligation to teach the Faith.

^{225.7} Regarding the distinctive roles of the institutions of the Faith and the individual believers in the spread of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, in the transformation of the individual and collective lives of peoples and the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, they are described by the House of Justice as follows:

^{225.7a} 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.²²⁵⁻³

You ask what you should do if you feel the institutions are not functioning according to the Sacred Writings. You will find it helpful in this respect to deepen your understanding of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the subject of the Covenant, possibly by arranging to study with a believer who is clearly knowledgeable in the Faith. To question the actions or directions of a Bahá’í institution certainly does not in itself constitute a violation of the Covenant. One of the distinguishing features of the Bahá’í

225-2. See no. 48, pp. 81–85.

225-3. MUHJ, no. 453.8.

Faith is the extent to which it liberates the individual to give expression to his understanding of the Bahá'í Teachings and to offer to the institutions of the Faith his views about the needs and opportunities which he perceives to exist. However, this remarkable freedom of thought is accompanied by the duty placed upon every believer to obey the Spiritual Assemblies, and to recognize that the wisdom of consultation by an Assembly may be regarded as yielding a greater understanding of an issue than that to which one individual has access.

You are assured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, that you may achieve your desire for a deeper understanding of the verities of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and that your endeavors in the path of service to His Cause may be divinely guided and confirmed. ^{225.8}

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

226

Message to the Youth Forum, Ontario, Canada

5 MAY 1996

To the Youth gathered at the Youth Forum in Kingston, Ontario, Canada
Dear Friends,

We are delighted that, at this very early point in the Four Year Plan, you have gathered together in Kingston to chart your course for the extraordinary period of opportunity ahead between now and the end of the century. We send our heartfelt greetings to each and all of you. ^{226.1}

At every stage in the growth of the Faith, young people have arisen to play a vital role in its propagation and consolidation. In this day, the opportunities available for Bahá'í youth to contribute to the awakening of mankind to the divine purpose of human existence are vast, and the privilege of leading not only your peers but all people towards the world civilization of Bahá'u'lláh is within your grasp. May this forum mobilize your energies and strengthen your ardor to spread the Divine Teachings, and reinforce your eagerness to assure that the standard of the Cause of God is raised in every province, territory, city and hamlet in Canada. ^{226.2}

Although the task before you is great, do not hesitate. Equipped with the Sacred Writings for your guidance, and with complete trust in the unfailing ^{226.3}

aid of the Blessed Beauty as your strength, you are assured of success in all that you endeavor on His behalf.

226.4 We shall remember you with love in our prayers at the Sacred Threshold.
With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

227

The Disintegration of Society and the Building Up of the Bahá'í Community

13 MAY 1996

To an individual believer
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

227.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to respond on its behalf to your thoughtful letter. . . .

227.2 The questions raised in your letter go to the heart of the issues facing Bahá'ís everywhere at this critical point in world history. We are witnessing the disintegration of the great civilization which has, for over two centuries, dominated world history and shaped the behavior and attitudes of the most influential sectors of modern society. The defining characteristic of this civilization has been a materialistic view of reality, the conviction that both human consciousness and human society are essentially the products of material forces and that it is to these forces that we must look for the resolution of the great problems facing our world.

227.3 Clearly, this world view reflects a profound error about the nature of humankind. It has demonstrated conclusively its impotence to solve any significant problem facing the world's people today—political, social, economic, or moral. In the face of so massive a failure, a growing majority of people everywhere are being forced to reexamine fundamental assumptions. Speaking some fifty years ago of this accelerating breakdown, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith wrote:

227.3a A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. . . . Bewildered, agonized and helpless, [humanity] watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of

the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants.²²⁷⁻¹

As you have said, political calculations and partisan agendas that are based on the interpretation of reality that our world has inherited from the past hold no answers, whether socialist or capitalist, whether of the East or the West. 227.4

The question arises, therefore, on what basis can the advancement of civilization and the development of human nature continue? It is Bahá'u'lláh's answer to this question that poses the fundamental challenge of our age. In asserting that “this is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men”²²⁷⁻² and that “the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of the most great, this new World Order,”²²⁷⁻³ Bahá'u'lláh points humanity to the fulfillment of the promise that has sustained our race throughout the past thousands of years of civilization. His words envision an entirely new relationship between the regeneration of the individual's spiritual life and the reconstruction of society. Again, to cite the words of the Guardian: 227.5

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the COMING OF AGE OF THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet.²²⁷⁻⁴ 227.5a

227-1. PDC, p. 3.

227-2. GWB, no. 4.1.

227-3. GWB, no. 70.1.

227-4. WOB, p. 163.

227.6 It is in this context, we believe, that you will, through your own meditations and your association with your fellow Bahá'ís, find the answers to the questions that concern you. Essentially, the Bahá'í community is “pioneering” a new approach to the organization of society and the individual person's relationship to it, one that is based on a spiritual conception of reality. This effort follows two parallel tracks. On the one hand, we do all we can as Bahá'ís to acquaint those around us, including the organizations of society, with the principles and concepts revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, in the hope that this guidance may be put to practical use in the life of humanity. On the other, we are slowly building a global community which demonstrates, beyond argument, that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in a global homeland.

227.7 We cannot take on our consciences the responsibility for the way in which others respond. Nor can we afford to be diverted from our efforts by the accumulating evidences around us of the suffering and destruction that results from humanity's present course of action. Merely to glance back over the past several decades is to realize how steadily and irresistibly Bahá'u'lláh's vision of humanity's destiny is being reflected in the objective experience of our world. This process is steadily gathering momentum, and the challenge to each Bahá'í, as an individual, is to become an instrument of this historic process.

227.8 We are, as you say, only a minority. But this has always been the case at any great turning-point in history. It is the Revelation of God that makes this minority a creative force in history and that brings to each of its active members the deepest sense of fulfillment that human life affords.

227.9 The Universal House of Justice has been touched by the sincerity of the spiritual search reflected in your letter, and assures you that it will pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá'u'lláh will surround you with His confirmation and blessing.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

228

Elucidation on the Role of the Universal House of Justice

14 JUNE 1996

To an individual believer

Your email message . . . has been received, and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to reply as follows to the questions perplexing you regarding the House of Justice. . . . 228.1

Your first question stems from a statement made by an individual on an Internet Bahá'í discussion group which asserts that “Shoghi Effendi has allowed for the Universal House of Justice reaching a wrong decision.” In describing the House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states clearly, 228.2

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. 228.2a

It is the exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice to “pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed.”²²⁸⁻² It carries responsibility for the application of the revealed Word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty “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.”²²⁸⁻³ However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient, and the friends should understand that there is a difference between infallibility and omniscience. Like the Guardian, the House of Justice wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him it may well change its decision when new facts emerge, or in light of changed conditions at some 228.3

228-1. MUHJ, no. 23.11, quoted from Makátíb-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Vol. III, pp. 500–501.

228-2. WOB, p. 150.

228-3. CUHJ, p. 3.

point in the future. We have found nothing in the writings of Shoghi Effendi which suggests that the House of Justice would on any occasion reach a “wrong decision.”

228.4 Regarding membership on the Universal House of Justice being restricted to men, you are correct in your understanding that Bahá’u’lláh was explicit about the matter, and consequently it is not within the power of the House of Justice to rule otherwise at this time or at any time in the future. As to the additional information on this matter which “has limited distribution” mentioned in the statement posted on the discussion group, it is unclear what this statement is referring to. In 1988, the attention of the House of Justice was drawn by the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand to an unpublished paper which was being widely circulated on this subject; the comments of the House of Justice on the subject were conveyed in a letter to the National Assembly of New Zealand, a copy of which is enclosed for your reference.²²⁸⁻⁴

228.5 We hope the above comments are helpful in relieving any confusion you may have felt related to these matters. You are assured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold, that the Blessed Beauty may guide and confirm all of your efforts on behalf of His Cause.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

229

Clarification on Bahá’í Wills

1 JULY 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

229.1 Your email message . . . requesting clarification on various aspects of the subject of Bahá’í wills, was received at the Bahá’í World Center, and we have been asked to reply as follows. . . .

229.2 In your communication you pose five questions about Bahá’í wills. These will be addressed in the order set by you. The first question asks for confirmation of your understanding that the writing of a will is one of the laws in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which is currently binding on the friends. In a letter

228-4. See no. 52, pp. 87–91.

dated 9 June 1974,²²⁹⁻¹ written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, those laws listed in the “Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas” but which are not binding on the friends at this time were delineated, and as the entry at item IV.D.1.o “The writing of a testament” was not included in that letter, you are correct in your understanding. A copy of the letter is enclosed for your reference.

Furthermore, a memorandum dated 20 September 1994 from the Research Department of the House of Justice draws upon the Writings in regard to this subject and indicates the importance of every Bahá’í making a will (the attachment referred to is enclosed for your reference): 229.3

Bahá’u’lláh clearly establishes the making of a will as one of His laws. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 109, He instructs: “Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will.” The importance of this law is not to be underestimated, as can be seen from a careful study of the attached compilation of newly translated extracts from Tablets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Not only is making a will a spiritual duty, “one of the binding laws of this mighty Dispensation,” but it allows the individual full discretion to specify how his or her property, including the residence, is to be disposed of, and it is conducive to unity and agreement. Failure to draw up a will is considered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “disobedience” to the command of Bahá’u’lláh and as “non-fulfillment of the divine obligation,” and it leads to the division of the individual’s property according to provisions of the laws of inheritance. 229.3a

It is worth noting that the Bahá’í laws of inheritance apply only when the individual dies without making a will. Indeed, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets seems to indicate that the very provisions of the Bahá’í law of intestacy are intended as an incentive to individuals not to neglect the duty of making a will early in life. 229.4

Your second question also focuses on the writing of a will being a requirement; we believe that the above-quoted text sufficiently addresses that issue. 229.5

Your third and fourth questions concern the “spiritual” portion of a Bahá’í will, that is, that portion of a believer’s will which is a statement of faith, 229.6

229-1. MUHJ, no. 147.

rather than a statement about the material or, to use your word, “ordinary” aspects of a will, such as distribution of one’s possessions and provision for the upbringing of one’s children. It would seem that your understanding that the individual believer should draft the “spiritual” portion of his or her will, rather than asking a lawyer to do so, is in keeping with the same paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas referred to earlier, paragraph 109, which provides guidance as to the “spiritual” content and, additionally, makes a specification regarding how the individual should head the document:

229.6a Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will. The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Faithful.

229.7 Note 137 in “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas” adds clarification of the reference in this passage to the Most Great Name:

229.7a As explained in note 33, the Greatest Name of God can take various forms, all based on the word “Bahá.” The Bahá’ís in the East have implemented this injunction of the Aqdas by heading their wills with such phrases as “O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious,” “In the name of God, the All-Glorious” or “He is the All-Glorious” and the like.

229.8 Aside from these prerequisites stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the friends are free to formulate the provisions of their wills as they please, and should compose their wills according to their own wishes.

229.9 Your fifth question centers on the provision for Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Bahá’í wills. Your understanding that the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh arises during one’s lifetime and is normally to be carried out with lifetime giving is correct, although at the same time it is true that there may be cases where a believer dies without having made provision in his or her will for payment of the unpaid portion of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, if any. The event of death does not remove from a believer the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh. Whatever portion is due to be paid is therefore a debt due from the believer’s estate at the time of his or her death. The cost of the funeral and burial, the pay-

ment of the debts of the deceased, and the payment of whatever portion of Ḥuqúqu'lláh remains due are prior charges on the estate which must be met before arriving at the amount of the property which has to be divided in accordance with the provisions of the law of inheritance. Thus, whether or not a person makes a will or, having made a will, whether he or she makes provision in it for the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be paid, like all debts, before the rest of the estate is divided.

In light of this, it is certainly advisable for a believer to make the necessary arrangements for payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh prior to his or her death, in order to avoid complications or confusions which could arise. It should be noted that the question of a legal wording to include provision in a will for the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh after a believer has died is dependent upon so many factors, that it would be preferable to seek legal advice so that wording which is appropriate and in accordance with the laws governing inheritance can be used. Obviously, unless the believer leaves a clear accounting of his or her property and payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to date, if any, it will not be possible for anyone to calculate accurately what remains to be paid at the time of death. While the application of the principles involved in payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh may well require subsidiary legislation by the House of Justice in the future, at the present time it falls to the executor or administrator of an estate to apply them to the extent possible, using his or her best judgment and taking into account the information available. Finally, while the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is each individual's own responsibility, a believer may be referred to the nearest Representative of the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, who could advise him or her in the light of any specific circumstances.²²⁹⁻²

We hope that the foregoing will be of assistance to you in clarifying and strengthening your understanding of the relevant issues involved in the subject of Bahá'í wills. Your efforts to aid the friends in recognizing the importance of this document, and particularly in grasping its spiritual significance, are commended. Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that your endeavors may attract bounteous confirmations from the Concourse on High.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

229-2. Note that in paragraphs 9 and 10, any action taken by an executor should be within the bounds of civil law.

EXTRACTS FROM FOUR TABLETS BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ
Concerning the Question of Inheritance

229.12 O ye the relatives of that servant of God!

229.13 Give thanks unto God that ye have been successful in distributing the inheritance in the manner laid down by Him. This is the first time in this great Cycle that an inheritance hath been so distributed. God willing, all will follow your example in carrying this law into effect.

229.14 In this connection, it should be noted that the question of the will is of extreme importance: everyone should devote the most serious attention to drawing up a will, so that there should be no one who doth not have a will. This is one of the binding laws of this mighty Dispensation. We ask God to bestow a blessing upon your affairs so that they may prosper abundantly.

229.15 Upon you be greeting and praise.

[1]

229.16 As for the question of inheritance which is occasioning perplexity: in truth, one is entirely free during his lifetime to make provision in his will for the division and distribution of his property amongst his heirs in whatsoever manner he seeth fit, in order that his wishes may then be implemented after he hath passed away. The writing of a will is obligatory upon everyone; everyone, that is, must in his lifetime draw up a will that is firm, sound, and clear in its provisions; seal and hide it; and guard it in a very safe place. In drawing up his will the testator enjoyeth full discretion to dispose of his property as he seeth fit; his will is a binding instrument, having precedence over any other provision, and no one hath the power to either modify or change it. Under these conditions, should he bequeath his whole property to his children, he is but acting within his rights. In the event, however, of disobedience to this command, of failure to draw up a will, and of non-fulfillment of the divine obligation; likewise in the event of disappearance of the will itself, the testator's property will be divided up according to the designated shares.

229.17 In truth, the wisdom of this perspicuous and most mighty ordinance is that no one should draw breath without a will. Observe how, in the absence of a will, the inheritance in its entirety is divided up, distributed and dispersed contrary to the wishes of the deceased; what difficulties and disagreements are thus engendered! The will, however, is the settler of every dispute, and the cause of ease for all, for in it the testator disposeth of his property in whatsoever manner he desireth. How agreeable it is for the

estate in its entirety to be disposed of in accordance with the testator's will and pleasure! Observe ye how many people during their lifetime are fearful about what will happen when they pass away. Now, with this divine commandment—the obligation and religious duty of drawing up a will before one's passing—all these difficulties are resolved.

[2]

As regards the holy verse, the intention of the reference to 'male, not female,' is the firstborn son, for in all the Divine Dispensations the firstborn son hath enjoyed a special distinction. Refer ye to the Torah and the Gospel, and likewise to the traditions related from aforetime. Read ye the story of Esau, Jacob and the sons of Isaac in the Torah, that it may become apparent that in all the divine Dispensations the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright, let alone the vanities of this world. Even the just laws current amongst civilized states and peoples have also accorded to the firstborn son a special distinction. 229.18

Today the English state claimeth to be the most enlightened in the world. Among the characteristics of the English people is that they restrict the property in its entirety to the firstborn son. Their reasoning in this is that when an accumulation of wealth is divided up it is dispersed and lost. A certain individual, for instance, amasseth with untold pains a considerable fortune; then, upon his death, his fortune is divided up, and this division causeth it to be dispersed and scattered to the winds. If, however, it be restricted to the firstborn son, it is preserved intact, and he careth for others. For this reason there are at present among the English people many households in which, for four or five centuries, the family fortune hath remained intact without having been distributed and dispersed. 229.19

Our intention in this is not at all that it is commendable and praiseworthy to restrict the inheritance to the firstborn son. Our intention is rather to show that in the laws of civilized countries the firstborn son hath likewise been accorded a special distinction. By 'firstborn son' is intended the eldest of the surviving male children. The aim of assigning the residence exclusively to him is that at least the home of the deceased may be preserved intact, so that whoever among his family should either reside or visit there may be put in mind of him, and seek God's pardon and forgiveness for him. 229.20

All these matters, however, are of secondary importance. That which is of primary and fundamental importance, and constituteth, by the express 229.21

pronouncement of the holy text, a divinely established obligation, is the making of a will. Everyone must in his lifetime draw up a will, and dispose of his property in whatsoever manner he deemeth fit, while having due regard for the need to observe justice and equity. Under these conditions, there will be no one who hath not made a will, and inheritance will thus be dealt with according to the will of the deceased. The said provisions are applicable only when someone dies without having made a will. The testator, then, is free to bequeath the residence to whomsoever he wisheth; or, if he desireth, he may devise it to all his heirs jointly. No room hath now been left for misunderstanding, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hath elucidated the intention of the divine law. Let whomsoever wisheth turn towards it; whosoever wisheth not will turn away from it. In any case, Our function is to elucidate the law of God, and to explain the meaning of the compendious verses.

[3]

229.22

The residence is under all conditions the property of the firstborn son, irrespective of whether or not the deceased should have left behind him other property as well. The firstborn son receiveth, moreover, his share of the remainder of the estate. This is that which God hath prescribed. The testator is, however, at liberty while still alive to dispose of his property in whatsoever manner he seeth fit. Likewise, the firstborn son must himself, for the sake of God, take into consideration the other heirs, and be just and fair to them. In truth, it is obligatory for everyone, by the express requirement of the divine text, to draw up a will, so that it may be implemented after he hath passed away. This, verily, is the perspicuous truth. If, God forbid, he disobeyeth the divine command—faileth, that is, to draw up a will—then his estate must be divided up in the stipulated manner.

[4]

230

Maturation of Individuals and Institutions

17 JULY 1996

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your email message of 24 June 1996 . . . regarding the distinction between maturation of Bahá'í institutions and of the members of those institutions, was forwarded to the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to reply as follows. 230.1

Maturation should be regarded as a process of evolution which is destined to lead to the stage when the institutions become developed and capable of accomplishing the great tasks assigned them for achieving the ultimate unfoldment of the Bahá'í World Order. 230.2

There is, of course, a close link between the maturation of the individual members and that of the institutions. While the process of evolution which maturation entails is equally applicable to individuals, it should be remembered that even when all members may be highly developed in terms of Bahá'í virtues and spiritual qualities, the collective entity itself needs time to evolve and achieve maturity as an institution. This evolutionary process requires the unwavering support of individuals through considerable courage and vigilance in demonstrating their love, respect and trust for the institutions, as well as loyal obedience to the decisions made by them. 230.3

Shoghi Effendi stated, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, that difficulties and evidences of immaturity seem to be an inevitable phase in the growth of the Bahá'í Administration, which is so much more perfect than the believers called upon to establish it. 230.4

We hope that the above thoughts will be helpful to you in obtaining the enlightenment sought by your Assembly on this important subject. 230.5

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

231

Financial Requirements of the Training Institutes

6 AUGUST 1996

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{231.1} We are greatly heartened by the news reaching us of the enthusiastic response of the friends to the Four Year Plan. Particularly encouraging are the efforts of National Spiritual Assemblies everywhere to establish training institutes and to systematically address the development of human resources. The number of national and regional institutes is rapidly increasing, and indications are that there may be more than one hundred operating in the world by the close of the first year of the Plan. We cherish the hope that from each of these centers of learning will issue forth ever-growing contingents of believers capable of carrying out a wide array of services to the Cause, creating thus in every country the capacity to sustain the process of entry by troops.

^{231.2} In some national communities, economic conditions are such that institutes can be financially self-supporting from the outset. But the majority of communities cannot meet the expenses associated with the operation of their training institutes. These expenses include materials for courses, teaching and office supplies, communications, maintenance of equipment, and sometimes transport of students and their food and lodging.

^{231.3} The most crucial item in the budgets of the institutes of many countries, however, is financial support for full- and part-time staff to coordinate training activities and to offer courses both at a central site and in the surrounding towns and villages. With this latter need in mind, we drew attention in the Riḍván message to Bahá'u'lláh's call that the believers should center their energies on the propagation of the Faith of God and to His injunction that: "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. . . ." ²³¹⁻¹ We then stated that deputizing a teacher serving an institute would be one way of fulfilling this responsibility and indicated that the friends could contribute to the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as the Local, National and International Funds, for this purpose.

231-1. GWB, no. 96.3.

In order to lend impetus to this vital development, we have now made a contribution of US\$300,000 to be divided among the five Continental Funds according to the circumstances in each continent. Although this contribution is but a fraction of the amount called for, it is our hope that the friends, especially those with means, will follow suit and will give adequate attention to this area of urgent need. Since financial requirements vary from country to country, the Continental Counselors will be the best source of information on the level of deputization required for various regions throughout the world. We are asking them to keep their Auxiliary Board members informed so that they can advise those who wish to contribute to this pressing worldwide enterprise. 231.4

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

232

Electioneering

18 AUGUST 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your fax letter of 2 May 1996, and appreciates your clearly heartfelt concern that reports of Assemblies should be presented in ways which are in accordance with Bahá'í standards of propriety and that any suggestion of electioneering be avoided. It has asked us to send you the following reply. 232.1

Electioneering is a practice foreign to the spirit of Bahá'í administration. However, it is necessary to distinguish between electioneering and those activities which should be entirely natural and normal in Bahá'í communities. Bahá'ís travel and teach the Faith, they go pioneering, they represent the Faith in relation to non-Bahá'í agencies, they serve in positions of responsibility. There is no reason why such services should be carried on anonymously. Bahá'í voters have to acquire the maturity to estimate the character and true capacities of their fellow-believers, to be able to distinguish between a person who is self-sacrificingly serving the Cause with all due modesty, and one whose activities are carried out with the primary purpose of bringing himself or herself to the attention of the friends. 232.2

232.3 Bahá'ís, nevertheless, are subject to all the pressures and standards of the prevalent culture of the society in which they live, and can only too easily be unconsciously influenced in their behavior by the accepted norms of that culture. One of our challenging tasks as Bahá'ís, however, is to establish, through our personal conduct and through the pattern of life in our communities and institutions, those cultural standards which Bahá'u'lláh wishes us to uphold. In a description of the characteristics of those who are called upon to serve in Bahá'í administrative institutions, Shoghi Effendi says:

232.3a 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 serve, but also their esteem and real affection.

(*Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932*
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 64.)

232.4 As such attitudes and standards become, ever more clearly, the norm of Bahá'í society, the friends will have little difficulty in distinguishing among their fellow-believers those who are worthy of their votes.

232.5 With this understanding, the inclusion of the names of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly and of the members of its various committees in its Annual Report is natural and has been a normal practice of National Spiritual Assemblies during the lifetime of Shoghi Effendi and ever since. Likewise it is normal, in writing reports in general, to include the names of believers who have rendered particular services, even though it is not possible to mention every person who has contributed to the achievement.

232.6 One of the believers wrote to the Guardian asking how the friends could know for whom to vote as delegates from their electoral district. In the reply written on behalf of the Guardian on 25 March 1949, his secretary said: “the friends, through regional newsletters, National News-Letter, conferences and association with each other, can get to know other Bahá'ís in their

state, and become familiar enough with their services and qualifications to vote for their delegates intelligently.” It can be seen from this that the Guardian expected the activities of the friends to be reported, and expected the Bahá’ís to be alert to the qualities and services of their fellow-believers.

The House of Justice trusts that these explanations have helped to ^{232.7} assuage your concern and assisted you in your evaluation of the activities of the various friends. It was very happy to note your eager response to the call of the Four Year Plan and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your endeavors on behalf of the Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

233

Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Bahá’í Faith in Brazil

22 AUGUST 1996

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

It is with feelings of deep gratitude to Bahá’u’lláh that we share with the ^{233.1} Bahá’í world the news of a historic event which has just transpired in Brazil. As representative of the Bahá’í World Center, the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum attended, as honored guest, a special session of the Brazilian Federal Chamber of Deputies called for the purpose of marking the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá’í Faith into that country. Glowing tribute was paid to the life and work of Amatu’l-Bahá herself, as a defender of the cause of world peace and unity, an advocate of the interests of indigenous peoples, and a promoter of the social development of the earth’s inhabitants and the safeguarding of the environment.

The session was attended by 90 Federal Deputies and was reported by ^{233.2} both the press and the broadcast media. The addresses of the 14 Deputies who spoke included many appreciations of both the principles of the Faith and the benefits that their application has already brought to many localities in the country. Highly gratifying, too, was the recognition expressed of the role of Leonora Holsapple Armstrong, the Bahá’í pioneer through whose sacrificial efforts the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh was established in Brazil.

233.3 Bahá'ís present were deeply touched when, at the invitation of the Deputy who had been asked by the Speaker to close the session with a Bahá'í prayer for unity, the entire company arose and stood in reverent silence as Bahá'u'lláh's words were recited.

233.4 The following day, Amatu'l-Bahá had a cordial meeting with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil's Head of State.

233.5 This momentous acknowledgement of the transforming power of the Faith, so generously expressed by the governing institutions of one of the world's major nations, demonstrates both the calibre of the Brazilian believers and the growing receptivity of the world to the Message of the Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

234

Development of Local Spiritual Assemblies in Light of the Establishment of Training Institutes

29 AUGUST 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

234.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter . . . and perceives therein a deep concern to uphold the best interests of the Faith and an earnest desire to labor for its advancement. We have been directed to reply to your letter as follows. . . .

234.2 You have asked a number of clearly formulated questions related to the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies. But, in fact, the essence of the answers to these questions is contained in many of your own statements. Therefore the House of Justice wishes merely to clarify, in brief, a few points you have raised.

234.3 It is true that the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is of paramount importance to the worldwide Bahá'í community. As you are aware from the messages written by the House of Justice regarding the Four Year Plan, the successful unfoldment of the Plan will depend upon the actions to be taken by three participants—the individual believer, the institutions, and the local community. It is to be expected, then, that the development of all three will have to be addressed by National Spiritual Assemblies every-

where. The manner in which this development occurs, however, may vary from region to region within a country, and even from locality to locality.

Awareness of particular needs and of the importance of applying certain principles is only one consideration, albeit a significant one, in devising programs of action. The resources available, the capacity of those who will carry the action out, the methods that have been discovered and refined at any given moment—these must also be taken into account when one is deciding what to do. That after so many years of constant effort throughout the Bahá'í world methods and approaches have been found to train at least a certain number of believers enrolled from among the receptive masses themselves—to deepen their knowledge of the Teachings of the Faith and to help them acquire skills and abilities to serve it effectively—is no small accomplishment, and these methods and approaches should now be fully exploited and utilized more extensively. Therefore, the emphasis on the establishment and operation of training institutes in the Four Year Plan is not only the expression of a great need in the Faith but also an acknowledgment of the capacity within the worldwide Bahá'í community to meet it on a large scale. 234.4

Clearly this emphasis does not imply that the work of strengthening Local Spiritual Assemblies should be neglected. Care must be taken, however, that over-concern about the role of the Local Assembly in community affairs not inhibit the friends from doing those things that can be done and which, in the long run, will lead to the development of the local community and its institutions. The holding of Bahá'í children's classes, which you mention, is a case in point. Naturally, the successful establishment of weekly children's classes under the guidance of the Local Spiritual Assembly would be one of the outcomes of a comprehensive approach to community development. Yet the lack of the desired method at any given moment should not be used as an argument against pursuing programs that help individuals to establish children's classes in the villages when this is perhaps their only developed skill. It should be remembered that, in the final analysis, all those activities carried out with a sincere desire to serve the Faith and with purity of heart will bring results and contribute to the development of dynamic Bahá'í communities. 234.5

During the years ahead, institutes in . . . and elsewhere will be training large numbers of believers to perform a wide range of services to the Faith. Those devising program content will teach methods, including those for 234.6

community development, known to them. As the number of active workers for the Faith increases and experience is gained, the content of the training itself will improve, and gradually the human resources will become available to help strengthen fledgling Local Assemblies in greater numbers. At this stage, the friends everywhere should not allow their anxieties, which arise only from their intense love for the Faith, to hamper them and should act with confidence.

234.7 The Universal House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

235

Pioneers and Travel Teachers for the Three and Four Year Plans

15 SEPTEMBER 1996

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

235.1 In June 1993 we raised the call for pioneers, both long-term and short-term, and traveling teachers for the Three Year Plan. We are now happy to announce that some 10,600 friends arose to serve the Faith outside the bounds of their homelands during the three years, evoking our admiration and pride. Of particular significance was the number of youth who dedicated periods of service to the Faith.

235.2 The Bahá'í world is currently launched upon the Four Year Plan, determined to advance the process of entry by troops. Pioneers and traveling teachers can make significant contributions to the furthering of this aim. Imbued with the spirit of humility, love and detachment, they can reinforce the work of the friends in every land in their efforts to increase the strength and influence of the Bahá'í community by the end of this century. National Spiritual Assemblies will soon be asked to adopt numerical goals for pioneers and traveling teachers to go forth from their countries to serve in the international field. We call upon the believers everywhere to ensure, through their enthusiastic response, that these goals are not only met but surpassed. Information about pioneer needs is contained in a document prepared by the International Teaching Center and is available to you through

the agencies of your National Assemblies and through the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

The prospect before us as the Plan unfolds is one to thrill every Bahá'í heart; the need of our fellow human beings for the Message of Bahá'u'lláh becomes more urgent day by day; ardent, willing and capable servants of the Cause are required in many lands and for many functions. That His eager followers in every community will arise with devotion, audacity and determination to advance His Cause is the longing of our hearts and the object of our fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold. ^{235.3}

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

236

Process of Entry by Troops

16 SEPTEMBER 1996

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Austria

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice was very pleased to receive your letter of 30 July 1996 enclosing the announcement to all the friends in Austria of the goals you have adopted for the Four Year Plan. The clarity with which you have set them forth and your emphasis on the respective responsibilities of the institutions, the communities and the individual believers should greatly assist the friends in acquiring a vision of what is to be achieved, and their own part in the work. ^{236.1}

You may still find that some believers have difficulty in accurately comprehending the concept of entry by troops. It may help you, when you encounter such problems, to stress the point made by the Universal House of Justice in its various messages, namely that arriving at the point of entry by troops, and then fostering it, is a process. It is the advancement of this process that is the goal of the Four Year Plan, and the exact steps to be taken in each area will depend upon how far the process has already developed by now. An essential element of the process is the preparation of the Bahá'í communities and individual believers and their training in the knowledge, not only of how to prayerfully attract receptive souls and to bring entry by troops about but, equally important, how to consolidate the gains so that it becomes an enduring development. No doubt you have this aspect of the ^{236.2}

Plan clearly in mind in the goal of establishing training institutes, which you have assigned to your own Assembly, and in which the Counselor and Auxiliary Board members will closely collaborate with you.

236.3 Certainly, characteristics of Bahá'í life such as a loving and understanding relationship between the individual believers and their Assemblies; a warm, welcoming and harmonious atmosphere in Bahá'í communities; and individuals who uphold Bahá'í standards in their everyday lives, are in themselves vital strengths in the advancement of the process. Such characteristics can help the friends, not only to attract others to the Cause, but also to manifest understanding, patience and encouragement in relation to the new believers.

236.4 The House of Justice was also very pleased to see that you have the aim of raising up National Spiritual Assemblies in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Bosnia. This is a major task, and the Universal House of Justice will pray for divine assistance to surround all who devote themselves to its achievement in such very difficult circumstances.

236.5 Indeed, the House of Justice will pray in the Holy Shrines that the friends throughout Austria will unitedly arise for the achievement of all the goals you have set before them in the Four Year Plan, and thus attract the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh on their strenuous labors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

237

Acquisition of Apartment in Paris, France Where 'Abdu'l-Bahá Stayed

28 OCTOBER 1996

To the National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies in Europe
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

237.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you all of the outstanding achievement recently accomplished by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of France: the acquisition for the Cause of God of the apartment at 4, Avenue de Camoëns in Paris in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed during His historic visit to the city.

237.2 This marks the first step in the acquisition of sites sanctified by the residence of the Master in the cities of Europe during the three visits He made

to that continent, between 1911 and 1913, for the purpose of spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, sites which are second only in holiness to those places in Istanbul and Edirne where the Manifestation of God Himself blessed the soil of the European continent.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

238

Message to the Arctic Teaching Conference and the Inauguration of a Bahá'í Center in the Arctic Region

NOVEMBER 1996

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the Arctic Teaching Conference and the inauguration of the Lapland Bahá'í Center in Inari Beloved Friends,

The inauguration of a Bahá'í Center in Inari, in the heart of the homeland of the Sami peoples is an event of great significance for the advancement of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the Arctic regions. This center is, at one and the same time, the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds of the Bahá'ís of Inari and a center for the study and activities of the Faith throughout a region which spreads across four countries from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the White Sea in the east, involving the active collaboration of four National Spiritual Assemblies. 238.1

May this Arctic Teaching Conference, held on so auspicious an occasion, give renewed vision and inspiration to all who take part. May your deliberations bring forth well-conceived plans and projects and cement the active collaboration of all Bahá'í institutions in the region. May each individual participant carry from it a bright light to illumine the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of the northlands and win victories that will excite the admiration and emulation of their fellow believers throughout the European continent and in all the Arctic lands. 238.2

We shall offer fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold for divine bounties and confirmations to guide your steps and reinforce your every endeavor in the path of His Cause. 238.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

239

Four Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran Sentenced to Death

28 JANUARY 1997

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

239.1 The Universal House of Justice has received the disturbing news from Iran that Mr. Dhabíḥu'lláh Maḥramí and Mr. Músá Ṭálibí, both of whom had been condemned to death for apostasy and had appealed against their unjust sentences, have been notified that the Supreme Court of Iran has confirmed the death sentences imposed by the Revolutionary Courts.

239.2 This news was received by relatives of Mr. Maḥramí and Mr. Ṭálibí during prison visits. It has been the practice of the Iranian authorities to convey verdicts orally to prisoners, and not to give them a copy of the actual text of the court decision.

239.3 A worrying development is that Mr. Ṭálibí, until now in prison in Iṣfahán, has been transferred to the notorious Evin Prison in Ṭíhrán. Similarly, Mr. Maḥramí has been moved within Yazd, from the prison of the Revolutionary Court to that of the Security and Information Department. . . .

239.4 Our letters of 2 April 1996 and 27 September 1996 give details of the cases of Mr. Maḥramí and Mr. Ṭálibí respectively, and the update on the situation in Iran sent by the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community earlier this month provides further information. We have recently received the following personal details from the Friends in Iran. Mr. Maḥramí is married and has four children, three daughters, two married and one unmarried, and one unmarried son; Mr. Ṭálibí is in his mid sixties, is married and has a family of adult children, two of whom live in Canada, one in Australia and the others in the family's home town of Víláshahr, Iṣfahán.

239.5 There are two more Bahá'ís presently under the death sentence in Iran because of their beliefs, Mr. Kayván Khalajábádí and Mr. Bihnám Mítháqí, who were first arrested in 1989, and have been kept in prison in suspense since that time.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

240

Call for Contributions to the Bahá'í International Fund

4 FEBRUARY 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With the Four Year Plan successfully launched and the believers in all parts of the world engaged in the energetic pursuit of its objectives, the Universal House of Justice has decided that it is timely to inform you of the state of the international funds of the Faith. We have been asked to convey the following to you. 240.1

As you are well aware, the major focus of attention for the past several years has been the Arc Projects Fund, with the friends summoned to provide financial support for the largest project ever undertaken by the worldwide Bahá'í community. The response of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every part of the planet has been magnificent, resulting in a sacrificial outpouring of contributions of a magnitude far beyond that ever previously achieved. The House of Justice was pleased to be able to announce in its Riḍván 1996 message the accomplishment of the Three Year Plan goal of 74 million U.S. dollars for that Fund. 240.2

It appears that the contribution of ten million dollars each year until the end of the century for the Arc Projects Fund, now being made by the believers in response to the call of the House of Justice set out in its letter of 20 June 1995, will be sufficient to meet the needs for completion of this enterprise, although there always remains the possibility of unforeseen disturbances in the years ahead modifying this projection. The planning and execution of the vast undertaking on Mount Carmel is being carried out with careful attention to economy, without compromising the high standards of construction befitting the edifices and terraces on the Mountain of God. 240.3

Even though there has been a striking increase in the total amount received at the World Center during the past several years, the level of contributions to the Bahá'í International Fund itself has diminished during that period, in which attention was centered on a strenuous endeavor to meet the needs of the Arc Projects Fund. In reaction to this diminution of support to the Bahá'í International Fund, the House of Justice enforced stringent economy at the Bahá'í World Center and also felt compelled to limit the funds available to meet the needs of the Faith in other parts of the world. 240.4

240.5 The Bahá'í International Fund provides assistance to Bahá'í communities in those countries where the believers lack the means to exploit adequately the opportunities for the expansion of the Faith and for the diffusion of its spirit. As the Cause of God moves irresistibly forward in every sphere of its manifold activities, propelled by the mysterious spiritual forces which are advancing humanity through a turbulent age of transition, the calls made on it can only increase. The Fund will be required to support the development of human resources, an indispensable element of the rapidly advancing process of entry by troops. With the emergence of new opportunities to increase the influence of the Faith on the affairs of humanity, the necessary means must be provided to expand the work of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations, the representation of the Faith at international conferences of non-governmental organizations, and the number of social and economic development projects scattered over the surface of the planet.

240.6 The work at the World Center, which is carried out with the support of the Bahá'í International Fund, includes the preservation and classification of the Sacred Texts, and the administrative functions performed here to meet the needs of a worldwide community expanding in both the magnitude and scope of its activities. An important aspect of this work is that of restoring and maintaining the Holy Places, providing facilities for pilgrims and an increasing number of visitors, and caring for the gardens which beautify the environs of the Holy Shrines. With the expansion of high-density urban development in the Holy Land, it is essential that properties be acquired close to the Shrines and other Holy Places, to protect them from disturbance; the favorable conditions now developing for such property acquisitions may not recur until the far distant future, and a substantial proportion of the resources of the Fund will be required for this purpose in the years immediately ahead.

240.7 Fully aware of the sacrificial response of the believers to every call addressed to them in the past, the House of Justice will continue to guide the friends in proceeding energetically along every avenue available for the advancement of the Faith and its interests. It will do so in full confidence that the dearly loved followers of Bahá'u'lláh will remain ever conscious of their privilege and duty to attend to the needs of the Cause, and will not suffer the onward march of the Faith to be retarded through an inadequacy of resources. It will offer its supplications in the Holy Shrines that their consecrated endeavors may attract the blessings of their Beloved.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

241

Passing of Hushang Ahdieh, Former Continental Counselor

6 FEBRUARY 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

PROFOUNDLY GRIEVED PASSING DEARLY LOVED SERVANT FAITH, HUSHANG AH- 241.1
DIEH. HIS INDEFATIGABLE PIONEER SERVICES AFRICA, INCLUDING OVER TWO
DECADES MEMBERSHIP CONTINENTAL BOARD COUNSELORS THAT CONTINENT,
AND TRUSTEE ITS FUND UNFORGETTABLE. HIS SELF-EFFACEMENT, HIS CAPACITY
PROMOTE CONCORD, AND HIS WISDOM COMBINED WITH LOVE EXEMPLIFIED IN
DISCHARGE HIS SACRED RESPONSIBILITIES WILL REMAIN SOURCE INSPIRATIONS HIS
COLLEAGUES AND FELLOW WORKERS GOD'S HOLY CAUSE.

CONVEY HIS BELOVED WIFE AND DEAR CHILDREN DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND AS- 241.2
SURANCE OUR FERVENT PRAYERS IN HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL
ABHÁ KINGDOM.

ADVISING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA HOLD MEMORIAL GATH- 241.3
ERING HIS HONOR IN HOUSE WORSHIP KAMPALA, AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES
THROUGHOUT AFRICA HOLD BEFITTING GATHERINGS THEIR COMMUNITIES.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

242

Message to the Seminar on the Spiritual Axis, Sydney, Australia

12 FEBRUARY 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia

We convey our warmest greetings to the friends from Australia, Japan 242.1
and other countries of the Pacific who have come together at the Seminar
on the Spiritual Axis being held in Sydney under the auspices of the Na-
tional Spiritual Assemblies of Australia and Japan.

This meeting is being convened at a time when the creative energies 242.2
released by Bahá'u'lláh are giving rise to fundamental changes in the condi-
tion of humanity in your region, breaking down age-old barriers to the
spread of the Faith and propelling the believers forward to gather the harvest

from seeds sown as long ago as the concluding years of the Apostolic Age of the Cause.

242.3 The spiritual axis with which your deliberations will be concerned lies in an area of great strategic value to the future progress of the Faith. It is positioned at the interface between the largest and most populous land mass in the world and an ocean extending over no less than one third of the surface area of the planet, within which are scattered island groups of diverse cultures. Sustained pursuit of the teaching work will not only immensely reinforce the human resources available to the Cause, but will also, in due course, attract worldwide attention to the Faith through the influence of the Teachings on the peoples of the small island nations of the Pacific.

242.4 It is our hope that, at this meeting, you will consolidate the basis for collaboration in the years and decades ahead through consultation on the challenges and opportunities which now lie before you, and through further reinforcement of the bonds of love and fellowship which unite you in your services to the Faith. By the formulation of plans for cooperative endeavors aimed at strengthening the national communities of this region and fulfilling the needs of the Four Year Plan, you can lay the foundation for dazzling victories in the future.

242.5 Our prayers will be offered in the Holy Shrines for the success of your consultations.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

243

Clarification on the Role of Continental Counselors in Pioneering and Travel Teaching

6 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

243.1 We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to respond as follows to your email message of 14 February 1997 on the subject of “Clarification on role of Continental Counselors in international pioneering and traveling teaching.”

As was indicated in the 27 June 1993 letter from the House of Justice ^{243.2} to the Bahá'ís of the World,²⁴³⁻¹ reference to which was made in your own letter, the launching of the Three Year Plan marked the beginning of a new stage in the administration of the international pioneering work. The implications were spelled out further in a letter of 30 June 1993, written on behalf of the House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies:

As the friends respond to the pioneer call, the National Spiritual ^{243.2a} Assemblies and their appropriate agencies will, of course, exert their utmost to offer the administrative support to facilitate their move. However, the approach adopted for the Three Year Plan should free the institutions from the pressure of filling specific goals and allow them to focus their energies on the spiritual preparation of the friends for this vital field of service.²⁴³⁻²

Accordingly, a Bahá'í is entirely free to arise for pioneer or travel-teacher ^{243.3} service wherever and for whatever term he or she considers best. In reaching such a decision, the individual is free to consult with his or her National Spiritual Assembly and its executive agencies or with a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member. Any of these agencies are similarly free to initiate such consultation, including the suggesting of possible goals, leaving the final decision in the matter to the individual concerned. Alternatively, a prospective pioneer may be moved to write directly to the Continental Pioneer Committee of the region which interests him or her.

All of this, of course, represents a major advance from the earlier stage ^{243.4} when National Spiritual Assemblies were obliged to place pioneers in specified goal areas. It was to this earlier period that the letters excerpted in paragraph four of your recent message referred. . . .

We trust that this responds to the questions which concern you and have ^{243.5} been asked by the House of Justice to assure you of its fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of the greatly appreciated efforts you are making to promote the vital pioneer work of the Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

243-1. See no. 159, pp. 339–40.

243-2. See no. 161, pp. 341–47.

244

Acquisition of Property for Terraces on Mount Carmel

11 MARCH 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

244.1 With joyful and thankful hearts we announce the successful acquisition after many years of difficult negotiations and the subsequent demolition a few days ago of the building which stood as the last obstacle to the completion of the first two terraces of the Shrine of the Báb at the foot of Mount Carmel.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

245

Role of National Spiritual Assembly in Private Businesses Run by Bahá'ís

17 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

245.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 24 January 1997 and has asked us to respond as follows.

245.2 The House of Justice commends you for the careful thought you have given to the issues raised about the relationship between the institutions of the Faith and those business enterprises which appear to be helpful in the attainment of Bahá'í objectives. Your account of the present understanding of the National Spiritual Assembly indicates that you are in a good position to offer suitable guidance to any believers who have concerns over these matters.

245.3 In drawing attention to private businesses set up by believers, and in encouraging the Bahá'ís to give serious consideration to availing themselves of such services, a National Assembly should not be regarded as endorsing these businesses, if that is understood to imply some form of guarantee about the efficacy of the service provided by any such business. The analogy of the books produced by Bahá'í publishers used in your letter is quite apt; in publicizing a book or article from such a publisher, there is no implicit

assurance that the document is free from error or even that the National Assembly is entirely in agreement with every point made therein. However the National Assembly can well conclude that the product of a business conducted by Bahá'ís (or even non-Bahá'ís) is useful in the advancement of the interests of the Faith and can properly decide to convey information about it to the believers.

Turning now to your question about a development trust becoming involved in the establishment of private business enterprises, no general ruling is appropriate at this stage in the development of the Faith. Every case should be considered on its merits. There is a vast difference between the institutions of the Faith becoming involved in a private business set up with the principal purpose being simply the accumulation of profit, and the institutions fostering and supporting individual and group business initiative aimed at the uplifting of people who have historically been deprived or suppressed. Other factors to be considered include the stage of development of the Bahá'í community, the resources at its disposal, the preservation of its reputation and the legal restrictions imposed by its incorporation. As specific matters arise in the future, you are welcome to turn to the House of Justice for guidance on issues you feel unable to resolve through your own consultation or through advice from the Counselors. ^{245.4}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

246

Music and Dance at Bahá'í Centers

24 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Côte d'Ivoire
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your faxed letter dated 21 February 1997 in which you raise various questions about the use of music and dance at Bahá'í Centers and we have been asked to respond as follows. ^{246.1}

As you may know, in many parts of the world there are certain tribal and traditional dances which are performed in glorification of God, and it is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of movement or dance. However, to avoid that such expressions of prayer become gradually ritualized, or that certain gestures and movements become ha- ^{246.2}

bitual accompaniments to prayers, it is preferable that they not accompany the reciting of words of the prayers. Through the revealed prayers, we seek communion with God, hence they must be offered with the utmost reverence and dignity. Each individual Bahá'í should be free to pray as he wishes, for there is no set form for prayer except for those few which have special instructions for observance upon their recitation.

246.3 In your second question, you ask regarding the performance of drama and cultural dances in Bahá'í Centers. Provided that the underlying themes or stories are noble and that they are performed in a way which does not elicit base feelings, there is no objection to choreographed dances and dramas, which are intended to illustrate Bahá'í principles, being held in a Bahá'í Center. This same principle would apply to traditional dances or dance movements associated with the expression of a culture. As long as care is exercised to ensure that the themes of such dances are in harmony with the high ethical standards of the Cause and the qualities of dignity and grace are upheld, there is no objection to their use.

246.4 With regard to what kind of music can be played at events in Bahá'í Centers, there is no particular type of music which Bahá'ís should or should not use. In this respect, a Bahá'í may well be best guided by the words of Bahá'u'lláh in the Most Holy Book, where He makes it clear that music can be both “a means whereby [the soul] may be lifted up unto the realm on high” and “as wings to self and passion,” and warns against allowing music to “cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity.” In the planning of Bahá'í events, it is left to those responsible for the program to determine “the bounds of propriety and dignity” and ensure that the music chosen is befitting the purpose and solemnity of the occasion, in view of what is most suited to the country's culture and customs.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

247

Importance of Upholding the Prohibition on Alcoholic Beverages

30 MARCH 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Ever since the launching of the Four Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice has noted, with deep satisfaction, the manner in which Bahá'í institutions and communities of the African continent have welcomed the spirit and letter of the broad lines of activity set forth in the Plan, and have particularly taken to heart its Ridván message for 153 B.E. to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Africa. As a supplement to that message, the Universal House of Justice wishes to convey the following comments to your National Spiritual Assemblies, and through you, to the body of believers in that continent. ^{247.1}

The development of the teaching work in Africa has always been characterized by the receptiveness with which the truths of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh have been accepted and valued by the peoples of that vast continent, by the joy stemming from the pure hearts of the African believers as reflected in their radiant faces, and by their growing maturity in appreciating the importance of adherence to Bahá'í laws and ordinances. ^{247.2}

One of these ordinances is the clear prohibition in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh of the consumption of alcoholic drinks. This has been explicitly revealed in His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. He states, "It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul."²⁴⁷⁻¹ In other Tablets, we read from His glorious Pen, "Beware lest ye exchange the Wine of God for your own wine, for it will stupefy your minds, and turn your faces away from the Countenance of God, the All-Glorious, the Peerless, the Inaccessible. Approach it not, for it hath been forbidden unto you by the behest of God, the Exalted, the Almighty."²⁴⁷⁻²

247-1. KA, ¶119.

247-2. KA, Notes, no. 144.

2474 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, adding His voice to that of the Blessed Beauty, has written, “The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind.”²⁴⁷⁻³ He has also written, “Regarding the use of liquor: according to the text of the Book of Aqdas, both light and strong drinks are prohibited.”²⁴⁷⁻⁴ He further states, “Intellect and the faculty of comprehension are God’s gifts whereby man is distinguished from other animals. Will a wise man want to lose this Light in the darkness of intoxication? No, by God!”²⁴⁷⁻⁵

2475 In answer to questions, Shoghi Effendi’s elucidations, written on his behalf, provide further guidance on this subject. In these letters the habit of drinking is described as a “great misery” and a “great evil.”

2476 It was the policy of Shoghi Effendi, upheld by the House of Justice, that, in the early stages of the teaching work in countries whose people have for centuries been accustomed to the use of alcohol, the institutions should be patient and lenient, educate the friends, and allow time for them to extricate themselves from this pernicious habit before applying sanctions. This education has been an ongoing process. Regretfully, however, it has been seen that in some cases, even among certain prominent believers, the friends have not freed themselves from this practice. Some may have wrongly thought that light alcoholic drinks, if taken irregularly, were permitted, without realizing the detrimental effect that their example was having on others. It is always most unfortunate when Bahá’ís of long standing, and even members of institutions at the national level, partake of alcoholic beverages, thus damaging themselves, harming the good name of the Faith in the eyes of non-Bahá’ís, and setting a bad example for the rank and file of the believers.

2477 The Universal House of Justice feels that it is vital, for the sound development of the Cause of God in those communities where there remains any doubt among the friends as to the importance of obedience to this law, that the National Spiritual Assemblies ensure that all believers are clearly informed of it. Of course, the Assemblies should not pry into the lives of individual believers; but in the case of any Bahá’í who blatantly violates the law, he should be counseled, assisted to overcome the habit, warned repeat-

247-3. ADJ, ¶49.

247-4. LG, no. 1171.

247-5. CC 2:1790.

edly of the consequences of continued disobedience, and ultimately, if he does not respond positively, be deprived of his administrative rights.

Furthermore, in order to protect the interests of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice has decided that, henceforth, any believer who occupies a Bahá'í administrative or teaching position on the national level and is seen to be consuming alcoholic beverages, should not only be counseled but should be removed from office during the process of the correction of his failing. If he does not give up drinking, he should lose his administrative rights; if he changes his ways, and the National Assembly is satisfied that he is obeying the law, he would regain his full rights. The positions the House of Justice has in mind are those occupied by members of the National Spiritual Assembly or any committee under its aegis, whether national or regional, by Bahá'ís who serve at the national office or in the training institutes at any level, and by traveling teachers and pioneers serving under the direction of the National Assembly or its subsidiary agencies. ^{247.8}

It is the hope of the House of Justice that such a step will give a signal to the entire community that, whatever the inherited cultural practices or tribal customs may be, every effort should be made by each conscientious believer to obey the sacred law of God which forbids the drinking of alcohol. The friends must become aware that there are certain essentials of Bahá'í conduct that they cannot continue to disregard with impunity. Continued, blatant disobedience to this law will, in the case of any believer, lead to consideration of deprivation of his voting rights. The friends should also realize that refusing to comply with this requirement will not only harm the offender and injure his family but will certainly impede his spiritual development and lead to the cessation of the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh—confirmations and blessings without which his life will eventually be brought down to misery. ^{247.9}

Love for God is best exemplified not through words, but through deeds. “Let deeds,” Bahá'u'lláh says, “not words, be your adorning.”²⁴⁷⁻⁶ By obeying His laws we demonstrate our love for Him. He has also written: “My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish.”²⁴⁷⁻⁷ ^{247.10}

247-6. HW, Persian, no. 5.

247-7. HW, Arabic, no. 9.

247.11 The guideline that Shoghi Effendi gave at the outset of the Ten Year Crusade, setting forth the manner in which the Bahá'í law on the need to abstain from alcoholic drinks should be explained while teaching the Faith to the people of Africa, is as applicable today as it was in 1953 when the Guardian's secretary gave the following advice on his behalf:

247.12 The question of impressing upon the Africans who are seeking enrollment the necessity of not drinking is a delicate one. When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith. On the other hand, once accorded membership in the Community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His Teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in conformity with His Laws. This can often be done gradually, after the new believer is enrolled.

247.13 Every effort should thus be made by the institutions of the Faith, as well as by those who are directly engaged in the expansion and consolidation work, to make conscious and determined efforts to assist the new believers to realize the grave consequences of disobedience to God's laws, and to appreciate the bounties that flow from growing spiritually under the shadow of His Holy Cause.

247.14 We are to assure you of the prayers of the Universal House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold, that you may be guided in the stewardship of your community as you strive to promote the vital interests of the Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

248

Message to the Iranian Believers— March/April 1997

BAHÁ'Í 154 B.E.

248.1 To the Lovers of the Most Great Beauty, beloved and faithful Friends,

The tremendous forces latent in the inmost reality of this precious Faith exert daily a fresh influence in the contingent world and shine forth with greater intensity. Through the outpourings of Bahá'u'lláh's bounties, and as

a result of dictates of the time as well as the mighty efforts exerted by the followers of His Beauty, the Faith's life-giving Teachings are taking root in the world of being, increasing its prestige and manifesting evermore its power to solve the problems confronting humanity. The blessed Divine Tree, we must know, is firmly rooted in the ground, while its branches and offshoots are growing heavenward. All this has been possible through the interaction and cooperation of two mighty, dominant forces which, in compliance with God's Will, are at work simultaneously, enabling the blessed Tree to grow, put forth its leaves and blossoms and, at the appointed time, offer to humankind its choicest fruits. One of the generating powers of this spiritual springtime is tempestuous and soul-stirring in nature; causing lightning and thunder, high winds, torrential rain, and roaring floods. These in turn cause the orchards and fields to become verdant and fruitful. The other is the inherent capacity for growth latent in the blessed seed. It is this capacity that causes the seed to grow as an essential necessity. The rays of the Sun of Truth and the sprinklings of the cloud of bounty help it to grow and become a mighty and fruit-bearing tree, providing a celestial retreat for the guided birds of the field. The overall divine design which leads humanity to spiritual maturity is not within our control; it is well guarded in God's hidden treasure house and its realization is dependent on His Will. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

In this wondrous Age, at this time when the Ancient Beauty, the Most Great Name, bearing unnumbered gifts, hath risen above the horizon of the world, the Word of God hath infused such awesome power into the inmost essence of humankind that He hath stripped men's human qualities of all effect, and hath, with His all-conquering might, unified the peoples in a vast sea of oneness.²⁴⁸⁻¹ 248.1a

The duty of the people of Bahá is to tread the path of servitude to the Divine Threshold, it is to spread God's Teachings and establish a spiritual civilization. Praised be God, the loved ones of God throughout the world have, for such a long time, hearkened to the directives of the Center of the Cause and, guided by the divinely ordained institutions of the Faith and according to specific plans, have advanced step by step to hoist the 248.2

248-1. SWAB, no. 7.2.

banner of the Most Great Name in every corner of the globe. The last in the chain of systematic successes achieved was the Three Year Plan which ended last Riḍván and produced heartwarming results. During those three years twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies were established, raising the number of National Assemblies to 174. Also, during that short span of time a considerable number of Bahá'ís, like unto a gentle breeze, passed through other countries and lands, engaging in the spreading of divine fragrances, enlisting a number of new believers under the banner of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and deepening their understanding of the tenets of the Faith. These achievements paved the way for the formulation of the present Four Year Plan which outlines the duties of the people of Bahá to the end of the twentieth century and mobilizes them to forge ahead and accelerate the process of fulfillment of divine prophecies. These teaching plans, which have successively set the worldwide Bahá'í community on the move and broadened the boundaries of the Faith, are the product of the creative power of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan. Over eighty years ago He summoned the followers of the Abhá Beauty to the spiritual conquest of the planet and gave them this responsibility. Thus, the teaching plans will continue until the Golden Age.

248.3 The collective duty and responsibility of the believers during the next four years has been spelled out in our last Riḍván message and the new Plan's prominent features explained. The believers have subsequently been actively engaged in carrying out its provisions. The focus of the present message is the Iranian Bahá'ís, who, when the dawn of guidance broke, turned their faces to the Sun of Truth and like unto birds of the dawn sang the songs of welcome and allegiance to Him, taking the joyful tidings of reunion to the people of every land in accordance with this celestial melody:

248.3a Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: "He Who is the Best-Beloved is come! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God's Revelation, and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His ancient Paradise." Let all eyes rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened, for now is the time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hearken to His voice. Proclaim unto every longing lover: "Behold, your Well-Beloved hath come among men!"²⁴⁸⁻²

248-2. GWB, no. 151.1.

The Iranian believers were not content just with spreading the divine Call; they rallied around the Promised One and arose to render Him assistance in whatever way they could. Life in hand and rank upon rank they hastened to the field of martyrdom. The memory of their sacrifices has been perpetuated by the Supreme Pen. The account of their heroism is too vivid in the minds of those of us who are the physical and spiritual offspring of such valiant and intoxicated lovers of the Blessed Beauty to need repetition here. Suffice it to say that we need be on our guard to preserve with our life the inestimable bounty bestowed upon us, lest ingratitude snatch the honor from our hands. 248.4

The historical background which has conferred upon the friends from Bahá'u'lláh's land the privilege of being the first to believe in Him and made them distinct in many respects has focused upon them the attention of Bahá'ís all over the world. Furthermore, in recent times when the gallant believers in the Cradle of the Faith were again persecuted by the people of malice, they defended, protected and proclaimed the Cause of God with the shield of detachment, reliance on God, heroism and certitude. This redoubled the degree of the worldwide Bahá'í community's expectation of the Iranian Bahá'ís who are scattered throughout the free world. They must, therefore, emulate the example of those lions of the field of steadfastness and learn from them the lesson of servitude. Consider the time when the tempest of ordeals started to blow in Iran again, how the spark of belief in the hearts of the members of the community, dormant in some cases under the ashes of worldly attachments, suddenly turned into a brilliant flame and wiped out the dust of complacency and heedlessness. The warning sound of the thunderbolt of events awakened them. They became mindful and, in the joyful gathering place of nearness to God, drank the brimful chalice of calamity. Oblivious of self, they laid down their heads at the feet of the Best Beloved. They faced depredation and dismissal from jobs with aloofness and detachment from worldly goods. When the relentless enemy leveled false, trumped-up charges against them to justify their evil doings, with a godly demeanor and heavenly behavior the friends frustrated the adversaries' designs and demonstrated the absurdity of their accusations, thereby proving their innocence in the eyes of broad-minded Iranians. The people of malice deprived the Bahá'í youth in Iran of higher education. The youth, however, did not sit idle. They busied themselves with the acquisition of human perfections. They endured every discomfort and persevered until in the realm of knowledge they excelled their peers. The attainment of this high 248.5

station and honor became possible when the friends in Iran, old and young, women and men, even very young children, realized that the remedy of all their ills was the remembrance of God. They started to study the Writings regularly and systematically. It was through their study that the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, enshrined in every Word of the Sacred Writings, came to their assistance and made of that community a new creation in whose eye the world and whatever it contains is worth nothing when compared with servitude to the Divine Threshold, attainment of Bahá'u'lláh's good pleasure and eternal life in every one of God's worlds. Therefore, they patterned their lives on the life-giving Teachings contained in the Sacred Writings. Consequently, they became the glory of this world and of the next, succeeding in promulgating the Cause of God in the far corners of the world and among the highest institutions of humankind.

248.6 The beloved friends from Iran who are scattered throughout the free world must never forget the grave responsibility they bear. For, the expectant eye of everyone is turned towards them, waiting to behold in the mirror of their deeds the splendors of God's Teachings. Consider the beloved Guardian's appeal to those dear friends:

248.6a . . . the beloved friends and members of the Assemblies should, in the manifold circumstances of their lives and in all their multifarious dealings and pursuits, by their deeds, their bearing and demeanor, seek to demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the excellence of this sacred Cause, to vindicate its truth, and give living testimony to its potency and the sublimity of its spirit. It is thus that the friends should proceed, not confining themselves to the delivery of the message, to explanations, expositions and elucidations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Chief Interpreter of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, has written: "Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not content themselves with the noise, the clamor, the hollowness of religious doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behavior. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavor, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of

inspiration is the essence of divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true Bahá'í. For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgement of the unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief." See how firm and strongly-worded is this statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, and how demanding its requirements! Notwithstanding, it is only when the Bahá'ís are able fully and befittingly to distinguish their characters by the adornment of these divine virtues that they will appear before the eyes of the world in a worthy and appropriate manner and that the name of Bahá'u'lláh will set the universe ablaze. The chosen ones of God in Iran should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues. Therefore, as the treaders of the path of salvation, we should strive with all our might and in every moment of our life to vindicate by deeds and words the reviving power enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings. In our association and conversation with others, in our transactions, performance of duties, our aims, and in major and minor undertakings we should so appear as to proclaim and prove to all that other than the unifying power of Bahá'u'lláh's Spirit nothing can transform the hearts of people and make of them a new race of men. This is the only means for the salvation and victory of the Cause of God.

The lovers of the Blessed Beauty in Iran, assisted by the promise which ^{248.7} says, "This is the only means for the salvation and victory of the Cause of God," saw clearly how astonished the enemies were when they witnessed the fortitude of the friends under trials and their deeds which complied completely with divine exhortations. It was such behavior that turned strangers into friends and supporters of the wronged ones. It is certain that tests are

not confined to the Iranian friends; the ordeals which confront the believers in the free world, although different in nature, will be as severe and deceitful. If they do not face such tests with the aid of a prayerful attitude and constant engagement in service, they are likely to be submerged in the ocean of bewilderment, confusion and remorse, wasting away the short days of their lives and leaving this world with empty hands. Of particular importance is the training of the youth to enable them to stand firm against the perils of the society in which they live. They should be encouraged to participate in Bahá'í activities, while pursuing their education in fields which benefit humanity.

Bahá'u'lláh says:

- 248.7a Whosoever attaineth Divine love at the earliest stages of youth, that one is accounted among the dwellers of the highest Paradise. Strive that from thee mayest appear that which will cause the exaltation of the Faith.

Also:

- 248.7b O thou who art young in age! May the confirmations of the Merciful enable thee to attain unto His bountiful bestowals. Since thou wert adorned with the recognition of the Daystar of Revelation when thou wert in the prime of youth, beseech thou God to enable thee to achieve that which will be immortalized in the book of existence. Mortality overtaketh everything except what is uttered and carried out for God's sake; such [words and deeds] are deathless. Strive that thou mayest drink of the wine of immortality and attain unto the Kawthar of steadfastness."
- 248.8 We ardently hope that Bahá'í youth who have their roots in the Cradle of the Faith will, in all affairs, stand out among their peers. The youth who received Bahá'í education have, undoubtedly, reached the stage when they can fend for themselves and face the tempestuous tests of the present day world with valor, confidence and self-assurance. The Bahá'í youth who have distinguished themselves and stood out in the non-Bahá'í world are a testimony to the truth of this statement.
- 248.9 The persecuted Bahá'ís of Iran are deprived of the bounty of teaching the Cause of God. The effect of this deprivation, which they regret immensely,

is mitigated when they hear that friends in other countries are carrying out teaching work on their behalf, or have arisen to execute a project in their name or in the name of the precious martyrs of that land. Such glad tidings prompt the Iranian friends to offer loving prayers for the success of the efforts of their faithful comrades in other parts of the world. We now join our eager voice to that of these Iranian believers and appeal to the friends from Bahá'u'lláh's birthplace in every part of the globe to arise in accordance with the requirement of faithfulness and make mighty and effective efforts to teach the Cause of God on behalf of their long-suffering brothers and sisters. For, teaching the Faith is a spiritual obligation from which no one is exempt; it is the magnet that attracts divine confirmations, it is the cause of the revival of hearts and souls. The Supreme Pen says:

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.²⁴⁸⁻³ 248.9a

He also says:

In one of the Tablets this exalted Word hath been revealed from the Supreme Pen: “Whoso is unable to teach should appoint a deputy.” 248.9b

Praised be God, this munificent banquet is now spread for the enjoyment of all. The Four Year Plan provides guidance to each and every one involved with the achievement of the teaching goals. In some cases, when people are unable to directly teach the Cause, they have been exhorted to depute someone to carry out this duty on their behalf. Should they be unable to depute one person, they can, in accordance with their financial ability, make contributions earmarked for deputization through local, national, continental and international funds of the Faith. In brief, all means have been provided for everyone to participate in the teaching work which, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the foremost duty, leaving no room for any 248.10

248-3. GWB, no. 96.3.

excuse. Moreover, the people of the world who are weary and helpless in the face of present-day ordeals are more than ever ready to embrace the Cause of God. Failure to take advantage of this opportunity would indeed be a grave loss, for it would deprive the aching body of humanity of a remedy placed freely in the hands of the people of Bahá. This is the day on which, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The cry of ‘where are Bahá’í teachers’ is raised from every corner of the world. . . .” Blessed are the ones who have hearkened and responded with heart and soul. This appeal is particularly significant these days because, according to the Four Year Plan, in the concluding years of this century the number of teachers should so increase as to hasten the entry of troops under the shadow of God’s Cause. The dearly loved Iranian believers, wherever they reside, must not deprive themselves of the bounty of participation in Bahá’í activities. They should rather arise unitedly with the native friends and join forces with them to offer befitting service under the direction of Bahá’í institutions. Nay, they should even take the lead and become renowned in servitude to the Divine Threshold.

248.11 Another matter of great import which the Iranian believers cannot afford to neglect is the instruction of children in spiritual attributes, human perfections and heavenly character. In this, too, they can learn from the example of the sacrificial friends of Iran who train their children from infancy under their loving care, adorn them with the ornaments of a praiseworthy character, and help them to advance in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of spiritual truths, thus exemplifying this exhortation from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

248.11a . . . exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá’í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.²⁴⁸⁻⁴

Also:

248.11b It is incumbent upon Bahá’í children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God.

248-4. SWAB, no. 972.

Whatever other children learn in a year, let Bahá'í children learn in a month.²⁴⁸⁻⁵

And again:

While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship.²⁴⁸⁻⁶ 248.11c

Consider carefully the following statement revealed by the Pen of the Ancient Beauty:

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.²⁴⁸⁻⁷ 248.11d

Nowadays in many countries people are rebellious and careless, morally corrupt and afflicted with various problems. At a time like this, obedience to the above ordinances is more vital than ever before. The friends in Iran have successfully put these ordinances to work and learned through experience that one of the immediate results of this endeavor is to empower their precious children at an early age to confront difficulties in school, on the street and in the market-place and to show forth heroism, thereby preserving their integrity and safeguarding the reputation of the Faith. The friends in other parts of the world should do likewise. For, should the children be deprived of a spiritual foundation, their protection from the onslaught of destructive temptations will be compromised. 248.12

One of the laudable services which the Iranian Bahá'ís everywhere can pledge to perform is initiating work on establishing character training classes 248.13

248-5. SWAB, no. 119.1–2.

248-6. SWAB, no. 102.3.

248-7. LG, no. 763.

for children and rendering assistance in maintaining them. Those friends who were the pupils of these classes and have enjoyed the sweetness of the fruits of such education should actively participate in this great service, which is the cause of strengthening every Bahá'í community, and provide for children's Bahá'í education everywhere.

248.14 Furthermore, the Bahá'í parents from Iranian background should endeavor to teach their children the Persian language, for Persian is one of the two languages of revelation in this glorious Dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh says: "In this Day when the Sun of Knowledge hath appeared and is resplendent from the firmament of Iran, it is fitting to praise this language as much as one can." He also says: "The Desire of the world speaks in the Persian language. It would be praiseworthy to Him, if His loved ones also converse and write in this language."

248.15 It would be a great service if, in every city and hamlet where a number of Iranian Bahá'ís reside, some Persian friends would exert special effort to teach this language to the children and youth, study together the Writings in Persian, and drink their fill from the billowing source of the Creative Word and Sacred Writings. We praise God for having enabled some Bahá'í institutions abroad to devise ways and develop programs useful for teaching the Persian language to those Iranians who live away from their homeland. Such programs can be put to good use for the achievement of this blessed service.

248.16 The valued friends of Iran have always been and continue to be at the forefront in rendering worthy services to the Cause of God. We need not review the record of sacrifices made in the arena of faithfulness by the heroes of the Apostolic Age. A careful look at the early stages of the Formative Age will enlighten us about the historic and crucial services of the Iranian believers in glorifying the Cause of God and its establishment throughout the world, and will evoke our admiration and praise. In the Ten Year Plan, which the beloved Guardian called the World Spiritual Crusade, a considerable number of Iranian Bahá'ís succeeded in opening up countries and territories to the light of the Faith. The names of these Knights have been recorded in the Roll of Honor. Also, numerous are those who have contributed generously to the establishment of essential and significant institutions. Recently, when monetary donations for the construction of buildings on the Arc became a necessity, the Iranian friends living abroad considered it unbecoming to lag behind others. As before, they stepped forth with high endeavor and participated as much as possible in providing the financial needs of those mighty institutions.

O friends of God, it is certain that the cloud of divine bounty and bestowal rains equally upon all humanity. However, we each partake of it according to our capacity. Although potentialities differ in accordance with degrees, not a single soul is completely bereft of capacity. Indeed, people's progress in this world is dependent on that preordained measure and the manner in which they fulfill their God-given potentiality. Accordingly, our responsibility is commensurate with our capacity, as it is said: "God will not burden any soul beyond its capacity." It is our ardent hope that the lifelong lovers of the Divine Beauty will, in the privacy of their conscience and in the presence of God, thoroughly assess their ability, judge their situation, and decide what kind and extent of service they can render in the path of the love of Bahá'u'lláh, then offer it in fulfillment of a vow of faithfulness, that they may attain the bounty of reunion in the everlasting world and reap the harvest of their existence. Otherwise, if they think only of their own comfort in this mortal life and be heedless of the purpose of creation, undoubtedly they will bring loss and regret upon themselves. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Of what benefit to humanity is the body's comfort which consists of the night's rest, the day's talk, the gathering of provisions in the morning, enjoyment of the fireplace in the evening, and the pleasure of a highly comfortable and extravagant bed made of finest silk and brocade! A considerable time is wasted in idle talk. Once it comes to an end, it is loss upon loss and manifest perdition.

How penetrating is Bahá'u'lláh's Utterance which exhorts His faithful servants thus:

Night hath succeeded day, and day hath succeeded night, and the hours and moments of your lives have come and gone, and yet none of you hath, for one instant, consented to detach himself from that which perisheth. Bestir yourselves, that the brief moments that are still yours may not be dissipated and lost. Even as the swiftness of lightning your days shall pass, and your bodies shall be laid to rest beneath a canopy of dust. What can ye then achieve? How can ye atone for your past failure?²⁴⁸⁻⁸

248-8. *GWB*, no. 151.4.

248.18 O beloved and faithful friends from the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth! Our longing, nay our hope and expectation of those valued friends is this: that in obedience to Divine commandments and exhortations, you become like unto morning stars, shining from the horizon of guidance and leading the way, thereby attaining unto that which the Peerless Beloved has desired and ordained for you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

249

Riḍván Message 1997

RIḌVÁN 154

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dearly loved Friends,

249.1 We acclaim with grateful hearts the eager response on all continents to the Four Year Plan launched last Riḍván.

249.2 Consultations of the Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies started an extensive planning process, also involving Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Through such a process the national and regional character of the derivative plans took shape. But this world-encompassing exercise did more than yield distinctive schemes for the different countries; it also boosted the collaborative relationship of the two arms of the Administrative Order, a most welcome portent of the victories yet to come.

249.3 A sign of the immediate impact of the Plan was the speed with which steps were taken to establish nearly two hundred training institutes during the last twelve months. Many of these have gone far beyond the point of designing their organization; they are actually in operation and have offered their first courses. Moreover, in the movement of homefront and international pioneers and traveling teachers; in the increased attention given by individuals to deputizing teachers; in the preparations made to ensure the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies only on the first day of Riḍván; in the increasing endeavors to hold regular devotional meetings; in the widening efforts to make use of the arts in the teaching work and community activities—in all these respects could be discerned the friends' keen awareness of the importance of concentrating on the requirements of the major

aim of the Plan, which is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.

Nor can we neglect to recognize other developments during the past year which confirmed the high merit of the manifold efforts being exerted by our world community and the results being achieved. Among these, to mention a few, were: the acquisition of the apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoëns in Paris where the beloved Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, resided during His historic visit to the city; the special session on 14 August of the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Brazil to mark the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá’í Faith into that country—a unique, official occasion at which Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum was present as the honored guest; the launching last July of the Bahá’í International Community’s site on the World Wide Web, entitled “The Bahá’í World,” which to date has received from more than 90 countries and territories over 50,000 visits, averaging some 200 per day. ^{249.4}

Hardly outpaced by such accomplishments, the construction projects on Mount Carmel maintained a dazzling momentum highlighted by the completion of the marble colonnade of the Center for the Study of the Texts, by the rise of the International Teaching Center building towards its seventh level, and by the ongoing emergence of the far-stretching features of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. In this connection must be mentioned the partial lowering of the section of the public road over which the line of terraces will pass, and the acquisition and subsequent demolition of the building at the foot of the mountain which stood as the last obstruction that had to be overcome to make possible the completion of the lower terraces through which the glorious pathway rises up towards the sacred Edifice and beyond it to the crest of the Hill of God. ^{249.5}

Also of acute relevance to the progress thus described was the maintenance of a level of contributions to the Arc Projects Fund which fulfilled the goal for the last year. Clearly, the financial demands in this regard are being met with incessant heroism by rich and poor alike, and must be sustained over the remaining years. At the same time, however, a parallel effort, equally strenuous and sustained, should be simultaneously exerted by the Assemblies and friends throughout the world to fill the critical needs of the Bahá’í International Fund. ^{249.6}

Such an auspicious beginning to the Four Year Plan as has been experienced cannot but inspire confidence in the hearts of the members of our ^{249.7}

worldwide community that they are fully equipped to execute its requirements as outlined in the messages that launched it, and as elaborated in the plans adopted by their respective Assemblies. A further and especially appreciated encouragement as we enter this second year is that circumstances have made it feasible for the reestablishment this Riḍván of the National Spiritual Assembly of Rwanda. This victory over crisis will bring to 175 the number of National Spiritual Assemblies that will be eligible to participate in the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention to be held next Riḍván at the Bahá'í World Center. How dearly we hope that by then, at the very midpoint of the Plan, the Bahá'í world will have made a major leap forward in the multiplication of its human resources, the maturation of its Spiritual Assemblies, and the evolution of its local communities!

249.8 The opportunity offered by the brief span of time before the century ends is precious beyond all telling. Only a united and sustained effort by the friends everywhere to advance the process of entry by troops can benefit such a historic moment. Responsibilities urgent and inescapable press upon every institution, every member of a community striving towards its God-promised destiny. As there is only a short period in which to achieve a great deal, no time must be spared, no opportunity lost. Rest assured, dear friends, that the hosts of the Abhá Kingdom stand ready to rush to the support of anyone who will arise to offer his or her acts of service to the unfolding, spiritual drama of these momentous days.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

250

Formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils

30 MAY 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

250.1 The expansion of the Bahá'í community and the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries have brought the Cause to a new stage in its development. They have caused us in recent years to examine various aspects of the balance between centralization and decentralization. In a few countries we have authorized the National Spiritual Assemblies to establish State Bahá'í Councils or Regional

Teaching and Administrative Committees. From the experience gained in the operation of these bodies, and from detailed examination of the principles set forth by Shoghi Effendi, we have reached the conclusion that the time has arrived for us to formalize a new element of Bahá'í administration, between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special kind, to be designated as "Regional Bahá'í Councils."

Regional Bahá'í Councils will be brought into being only with our permission and only in countries where conditions make this step necessary. Nevertheless, we find it desirable to inform all National Spiritual Assemblies of the nature of this historic development, and to make clear its place in the evolution of national and local Bahá'í institutions. 250.2

The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the "nucleus" and "pattern" of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. 250.3

One of the subtle qualities of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the balance between centralization and decentralization. This balance must be correctly maintained, but different factors enter into the equation, depending upon the institutions involved. For example, the relationship between a National or Local Spiritual Assembly and its committees is of a different nature from that between National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The former is a relationship between a central administrative body and "its assisting organs of executive and legislative action,"²⁵⁰⁻¹ while the latter is a relationship between national and local levels of the House of Justice, each 250.4

250-1. Letter of 18 October 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.

of which is a divinely ordained institution with clearly prescribed jurisdiction, duties and prerogatives.

250.5 Regional Bahá'í Councils partake of some, but not all, characteristics of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Bahá'í community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on committees which are characterized by the Guardian as "bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants.

250.6 The distinguishing effects of the establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils are the following:

- 250.6a • It provides for a level of autonomous decision making on both teaching and administrative matters, as distinct from merely executive action, below the National Assembly and above the Local Assemblies.
- 250.6b • It involves the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies of the area in the choice of the members of the Council, thus reinforcing the bond between it and the local believers while, at the same time, bringing into public service capable believers who are known to the friends in their own region.
- 250.6c • It establishes direct consultative relationships between the Continental Counselors and the Regional Bahá'í Councils.
- 250.6d • It offers the possibility of forming a Regional Bahá'í Council in an ethnically distinct region which covers parts of two or more countries. In such a situation the Council is designated to work directly under one of the National Assemblies involved, providing copies of its reports and minutes to the other National Assembly.
- 250.6e • The greater degree of decentralization involved in the devolution of authority upon Regional Bahá'í Councils requires a corresponding increase in the capacity of the National Spiritual Assembly itself to keep fully informed of what is proceeding in all parts of the territory over which it has ultimate jurisdiction.

250.7 For those National Spiritual Assemblies which have already established Regional Bahá'í Councils or Regional Teaching and Administrative Com-

mittees, we enclose a document which outlines the various policies governing the formation and functioning of Regional Bahá'í Councils. For the sake of simplicity, we have used the designation “Regional Bahá'í Councils” throughout, but the actual name used will, as heretofore, vary from country to country, including such names as “State Bahá'í Councils,” “Provincial Bahá'í Councils” or, when referring to an individual Council, “The Bahá'í Council for . . .” etc. To avoid the confusion of thought which seems to have been caused by referring to “Regional Teaching and Administrative Committees,” we have decided to cease using this designation and to refer to these bodies as Bahá'í Councils formed by appointment rather than election. We shall be writing separately to these National Spiritual Assemblies, indicating what modifications, if any, they should now make to the existing structures.

It is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold, that the establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils will greatly enhance the ability of the Administrative Order to deal with the complex situations with which it is confronted in a number of countries at the present time, and thus carry forward, with increased vigor, the propagation of the Cause of God. 250.8

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

30 MAY 1997

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES,

THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS

1. The Formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils:

- 1.1 Authority for the formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils: The formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils in any country, and the choice of the regions to be assigned to them are dependent upon the approval of the Universal House of Justice in each case. 250.9
- 1.2 Conditions indicating a need for the formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils: Regional Bahá'í Councils will be formed only in certain specific situations where this kind of decentralization is judged by the Universal House of Justice to be appropriate. 250.10

2. The Characteristic Features of Regional Bahá'í Councils:

250.11

2.1 Mode of Establishment and Membership:

250.11a

2.1.1 Regional Bahá'í Councils are not necessarily established universally throughout a country, but rather in those regions where the condition and size of the Bahá'í community indicate that such a development would be beneficial. In such cases, all other parts of the country remain under the well-established pattern of national committees, including a national teaching committee and its regional teaching committees.

250.11b

2.1.2 The number of members of a Regional Bahá'í Council is nine or, in certain cases, seven or even five, depending upon the decision of the National Spiritual Assembly in each case.

250.11c

2.1.3 In accordance with local requirements and the condition of the Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice will decide which Regional Bahá'í Councils are to be formed by election and which by appointment.

250.11d

2.1.4 It is within the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to decide, case by case, whether its members may also serve on Regional Bahá'í Councils. In general the preference is for members of National Assemblies not to serve on Councils, whether these be elected or appointed bodies.

250.12

2.2 Regional Bahá'í Councils formed by election:

250.12a

2.2.1 The members of an elected Regional Bahá'í Council, who shall be nine in number, are elected from among all the adult believers in the region by the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in that region every year on 23 May, the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb according to the Gregorian calendar, or on a weekend immediately before or after that date.

250.12b

2.2.2 Owing to the large number of voters involved and the brief interval between the National Convention and the elections of the Regional Bahá'í

- Councils, these elections are to be conducted primarily by mail, through methods to be decided by the National Spiritual Assembly. The voting is to be by secret ballot. The members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies may send in their ballots individually or they may be collected by the Secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly and mailed together.
- 2.2.3 If feasible and desirable, an electoral meeting, ^{250.12c} or several electoral meetings, may be held in the region for those voters able to attend, in order to provide an occasion for members of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the region to consult about the progress of the Cause. Other believers may attend, but would not take part in the voting.
- 2.2.4 If there is a tie vote, the tie is to be broken by lot, ^{250.12d} in view of the impracticability of holding a revote in such a situation.
- 2.2.5 Any vacancy on a Regional Bahá'í Council should ^{250.12e} be filled by the person who had the next highest number of votes on the ballot in the preceding election.
- 2.2.6 Auxiliary Board members are not eligible for ^{250.12f} service on a Regional Bahá'í Council.
- 2.2.7 The result of the election is to be confirmed by ^{250.12g} the National Spiritual Assembly.
- 2.3 Regional Bahá'í Councils formed by appointment: ^{250.13}
- 2.3.1 It is left to the National Spiritual Assembly to ^{250.13a} decide whether the number of members is to be five, seven or nine.
- 2.3.2 Balloting takes place among members of Local ^{250.13b} Spiritual Assemblies in the region, similarly to that for the election of a Regional Bahá'í Council, but the outcome of the voting constitutes a confidential list of nominations for the National Spiritual Assembly, which appoints the members of the Council from among these nominees and others, including persons proposed by the mem-

bers of the Auxiliary Boards within whose areas of responsibility the region lies.

250.14 **3. The Functions of Regional Bahá'í Councils:**

The functions of a Regional Bahá'í Council and the degree of authority conferred upon it are within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly. However, they should not be limited to those of a national or regional committee for, in such a case, there would be no justification for bringing into being a Regional Bahá'í Council rather than appointing a national or regional committee. The functions and responsibilities generally envisaged for a Regional Bahá'í Council are as follows:

- 250.15 3.1 To carry out the policies of the National Spiritual Assembly and to supervise, on behalf of the National Assembly, the smooth and efficient execution of the plans and projects for its region.
- 250.16 3.2 To keep the National Spiritual Assembly regularly informed of the Council's activities and of the conditions of the Faith throughout the region. Regional Bahá'í Councils are allowed to develop their own strategies and programs, and to carry out their day-to-day work without having to obtain further approval from the National Spiritual Assembly. However, through their frequent reports and the minutes of their meetings, the National Assembly is kept informed of their activities and maintains its overall supervision of the affairs of the Cause in all parts of the country.
- 250.17 3.3 To take initiative in the promotion of the Faith in the region and to carry out its decisions within the range of authority vested in it by the National Assembly. The National Assembly allows the Council a wide latitude for autonomous action, intervening in its work only in matters which the Assembly regards as being of major importance. The main task of a Regional Bahá'í Council is to devise and execute expansion and consolidation plans in close collaboration with the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the believers within its area of jurisdiction. Its goal is to create strong Local Spiritual Assemblies which will be the focal centers of Bahá'í activity, will exercise their vitally important role in the development of the Faith and will demonstrate their ability to regulate the affairs of their local communities.

- 3.4 To deal with both teaching and administrative matters within the region including the appointment of committees for issues within its terms of reference, such as external affairs and the translation, publication and distribution of Bahá'í literature. 250.18
- 3.4.1 In the area of teaching, a Regional Bahá'í Council may be given authority by the National Assembly to appoint, direct and supervise the work of a number of area or district teaching committees. In those cases where a Regional Bahá'í Council has to carry out a wide range of functions, it may also be authorized by the National Spiritual Assembly to appoint a regional teaching committee to be responsible to it for the teaching work in the region as a whole and for the direction and supervision of the area or district teaching committees. 250.18a
- 3.4.2 A Regional Bahá'í Council may be asked by the National Spiritual Assembly to arrange and supervise the unit elections for delegates to the national convention. 250.18b
- 3.4.3 The working relationship between the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly in an area where there is a Regional Bahá'í Council will depend upon the range of functions and responsibilities conferred by the National Assembly upon the Council. In any case the authority to deprive a believer of his or her administrative rights, or to restore them, remains with the National Assembly. The right of direct access to the National Assembly by a Local Spiritual Assembly is preserved. 250.18c
- 3.5 To be responsible, under the general guidelines and policies established by the National Spiritual Assembly, for conducting, on behalf of the National Assembly, the external affairs of the Faith at the level of the region, representing the Bahá'ís of the region in relation to the civil authorities of that region. 250.19
- 3.6 To take part, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly and in consultation with the Counselors or their 250.20

deputies, in the formulation of a plan for its region as part of the national plan within the framework of each worldwide Plan.

- 250.21 3.7 To devise, for the approval of the National Assembly, its own expansion and consolidation programs for the achievement of the plan for its region, within the overall framework of the national plan.
- 250.22 3.8 To formulate an annual budget for the region, in consultation with the Counselors or their deputies when advisable, and to submit this budget to the National Spiritual Assembly for its approval.
- 250.22a 3.8.1 Alternatively, should the conditions indicate the advisability of such a method, the annual budgets of Regional Bahá'í Councils may be specified by the National Spiritual Assembly.
- 250.23 3.9 To administer the budget for the region, sending regular reports and financial statements to the National Spiritual Assembly.
- 250.24 3.10 A Regional Bahá'í Council can be authorized by the National Spiritual Assembly to act as its agent in operating a regional branch of the national Bahá'í fund. In this respect the Council may perform the following functions.
- 250.24a 3.10.1 It encourages believers within its region to contribute to various funds of the Cause, including the regional branch of the national fund, with the aim that, in due course, the entire expenditure for the region would be provided by the believers in the region.
- 250.24b 3.10.2 If the whole of the budgeted expenditure for a year cannot be met by contributions from the believers in the region, the Council may apply to the National Spiritual Assembly for an allocation from the national Bahá'í fund.
- 250.24c 3.10.3 It is also within the discretion of the Counselors to allocate financial assistance to a Regional Bahá'í Council from the funds at their disposition.
- 250.25 3.11 Under normal conditions, correspondence between Regional Bahá'í Councils and the Bahá'í World Center should be ad-

dressed to the National Spiritual Assembly, which would then convey the communication to its intended recipient.

- 3.11.1 If, because of local conditions, the Universal House of Justice authorizes certain Regional Bahá'í Councils to correspond directly with it, copies of all such correspondence should be sent to the National Assembly. 250.25a
- 3.11.2 Copies of the *Bahá'í International News Service* and of certain circular letters may be mailed from the Bahá'í World Center directly to all Regional Bahá'í Councils. 250.25b
- 3.11.3 When Regional Bahá'í Councils publish Bahá'í literature or regional newsletters, copies of such publications should be sent directly to the Bahá'í World Center under the same guidelines as apply to national Bahá'í publications. 250.25c
- 3.11.4 Although, in general, Regional Bahá'í Councils can be authorized to correspond directly with the World Center in order to share current information about the activities of their respective communities, this should not be misconstrued as a means to bypass the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly in matters requiring guidance or decision. 250.25d
- 3.12 In most countries the legal status of Regional Bahá'í Councils would seem to be adequately covered by the National Assembly's incorporation. 250.26
- 3.13 Just as Counselors have direct consultative relations with National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, so they also have direct relations with Regional Bahá'í Councils. 250.27
 - 3.13.1 Whenever the Counselors feel it necessary or desirable, they are free to deputize one or more Auxiliary Board members to represent them in consultations with a Regional Bahá'í Council. Also, occasional meetings should be arranged between a Regional Bahá'í Council and the Auxiliary Board members responsible for areas within its region, for the discussion of the vision and strategies for 250.27a

the work. A regular and free exchange of information between Auxiliary Board members on the one hand and Regional Bahá'í Councils on the other is encouraged.

4. National Committees in the New Structure:

250.28 It is advisable for a National Spiritual Assembly to have a National Teaching Committee even if Regional Bahá'í Councils are formed in every part of a country. The functions of the National Teaching Committee in a country in which Regional Bahá'í Councils have been established are as follows.

250.29 4.1 The Guardian has referred to national committees as expert advisers and executive assistants of a National Spiritual Assembly. This suggests that, rather than diminishing the role of its National Teaching Committee when Regional Bahá'í Councils are formed, a National Spiritual Assembly would develop further the advisory and executive aspects of its responsibilities in certain respects. The capacity of the National Teaching Committee to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching work throughout the country could be enhanced. Through its knowledge of the progress of the work, it should be able to bring to the National Assembly's attention strengths and needs in any region. There are also a number of specific matters, such as the analysis of opportunities for expansion and consolidation in rapidly changing conditions, the identification of successful approaches to teaching, and the dissemination of promising teaching methods, which would benefit from the constant attention of a vibrant and competent National Teaching Committee. Issues related to teaching among minorities and specific groups who reside in more than one region of the country present another area which would benefit from a National Teaching Committee's attention.

250.30 4.2 The work of the National Teaching Committee in relation to Regional Bahá'í Councils is one of service and assistance, rather than direction and supervision as it is in relation to regional teaching committees. A parallel can be seen in the work of a national training institute, to which the National Assembly assigns the task of developing human resources: the institute assists the Councils by offering them programs

for the training of the human resources needed to carry out their plans in each region. The National Teaching Committee would, similarly, offer services to the Councils in support of the teaching work.

- 4.3 In countries where Regional Bahá'í Councils have been introduced only for certain areas, the National Teaching Committee is expected to perform not only the functions outlined above, but also to remain responsible, both directly and through its Regional Teaching Committees, for serving those areas not under the care of a Council. In carrying out such functions there must, of course, be close collaboration between the National Teaching Committee and its Regional Teaching Committees on the one hand, and the Regional Bahá'í Councils on the other. 250.31
- 4.4 In the case of all national committees, it is important to ensure that legitimate national programs do not run counter to the process of decentralization, except in special emergency situations. 250.32

251

Clarification on the Authority of the Universal House of Justice

3 JUNE 1997

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 29 April 1997 and has instructed us to send you the following reply. 251.1

The questions you pose, arising out of an email conversation between yourself and one of the other contributors to the discussion group in which you participate, are of fundamental importance, and the House of Justice warmly appreciates the spirit of your enquiry. 251.2

The issues raised seem to resolve themselves into two points: the first being whether or not the Universal House of Justice has the authority to make authoritative interpretations; the second is whether anyone has the right to challenge the authority or actions of the Universal House of Justice. When 251.3

these issues are approached with an understanding of the unity underlying all the Teachings, clarification results. Should the seeker, however, be influenced by a spirit of mistrust and conflict, then unending problems appear.

^{251.4} The above points have both been covered in three letters written by the Universal House of Justice on 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966 and 7 December 1969.²⁵¹⁻¹ Unfortunately it seems that many of the friends have not studied these letters deeply or understood their implications. Already in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” Shoghi Effendi has shown, beyond any doubt, that the function of making authoritative interpretations of the Teachings is confined solely and exclusively to the Guardian. Neither the Universal House of Justice, nor any other institution, person or group of persons can assume that function. That the Universal House of Justice will never infringe on the functions reserved to the Guardian is shown, not only by its own words and actions, but by Shoghi Effendi’s statement in that same document: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.” It is guaranteed by the fact that the Universal House of Justice as well as the Guardian are both “under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One.”

^{251.5} In its letter of 9 March 1965, the House of Justice has stated: “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 friends will to understand what this difference is by observing how the House of Justice functions and by turning to it for explanations when necessary.

^{251.6} As you recognize, the authority of the Universal House of Justice is unchallengeable. This is stated in numerous places in the Writings. In the same passage of the Will and Testament quoted above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to say of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice: “Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth

251-1. MUHJ, nos. 23, 35, and 75.

in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself, and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God.”²⁵¹⁻²

Furthermore, at the very end of the Will and Testament, in warning 251.7 against the danger of Covenant-breaking, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote: “Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn, and open wide the door of false interpretation.” In this context, He continues: “To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular conviction. 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.”²⁵¹⁻³

It is natural that the friends would discuss such matters among themselves, as you and your correspondent have been doing on your Internet discussion group; how otherwise are they to deepen their understanding of the Teachings? But they should recognize that the resolution of differences of opinion on such fundamental questions is not to be found by continued discussion, but in referring to the Universal House of Justice itself, as you have done. Prolonged, unresolved, public discussion of these fundamental questions can do nothing but breed confusion and dissension. 251.8

Some people have put forward the thesis that in place of the Guardian’s 251.9 function of authoritative interpretation, a check on the Universal House of Justice should be set up, either in the form of the general opinion of the mass of the believers, or in the form of a body of learned Bahá’ís—preferably those with academic qualifications. The former is in direct contradiction to the Guardian’s statement that the members of the Universal House of Justice are not “allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them.” “They are to follow,” he writes, “the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. *‘God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,’* is Bahá’u’lláh’s incontrovert-

251-2. WT, p. 11.

251-3. WT, pp. 25–26.

ible assurance.”²⁵¹⁻⁴ As to the latter alternative: this would constitute usurpation of a function of the Guardian.

251.10 Scholarship has a high rank in the Cause of God, and the Universal House of Justice continually consults the views of scholars and experts in the course of its work. However, as you appreciate, scholars and experts have no authority over the Institutions of the Cause. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, on 14 March 1927, to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Istanbul, it is 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 the 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.”²⁵¹⁻⁵

251.11 Comments have been made in recent times, implying the existence of two categories of believers, designated “administrators” and “academics.” The House of Justice feels that it is important to recognize the unsoundness of such a concept. In the nature of Bahá’í administration, there is no class of believers who serve as “administrators.” Individual Bahá’ís are either elected or appointed to positions of administrative service; they come from every field of endeavor, including academia. There is, moreover, a natural flow of individuals into and out of administrative posts. The same applies to the occupants of those institutions of the Administrative Order which are referred to as being of the “learned” in the Faith. Clearly there are some

251-4. WOB, p. 153.

251-5. MUHJ, no. 111.12.

Bahá'ís who are “academics” and some who are not, but “academics” in no way constitute a recognized group in relation to the structure of the Cause.

There remains the question concerning the authority for the duties and responsibilities outlined for the Universal House of Justice in its constitution. These provisions are a codification of explicit statements found in the sacred texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi. 251.12

The House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts to assist the friends to overcome misunderstandings and to clarify their vision of the Faith will be blessed with divine confirmations. 251.13

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

252

Message to European Bahá'í Youth Council for Seven Regional Seminars throughout Europe

7 JULY 1997

To the European Bahá'í Youth Council

The Universal House of Justice has received your faxed letter dated 23 June 1997 regarding the seven regional seminars which will take place in July. It warmly commends your consecrated efforts to inspire the Bahá'í youth in Europe to arise with enthusiasm and dedication and render valuable services for the progress of the Cause throughout the continent. The House of Justice is delighted that the Bahá'í youth in Europe are coming together to address the role each one is called upon to play in this extraordinary period of opportunities and challenges between now and the end of the century. 252.1

At every stage in the growth of the Faith, youth have made vital contributions to the progress which has been achieved in its expansion and consolidation. The Bahá'í youth must now seize the abundant opportunities before them to awaken mankind to the divine purpose of human existence, and to attract not only their peers but all the waiting souls to the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Although the task is great, let them not hesitate. The House of Justice is confident that, equipped with the Sacred Writings for guidance, and sustained by the unflinching assistance of the Concourse on High, they will achieve success in all their endeavors to serve this precious Faith. 252.2

252.3 You may be sure of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold beseeching the Blessed Beauty to aid and strengthen every step the devoted Bahá'í youth in Europe take in His path.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

253

Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office and Office of Public Information

11 AUGUST 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

253.1 In our letter of 10 October 1994 conveying a paper on the external affairs strategy approved by the Universal House of Justice, we were instructed to say that the coordination of the external affairs work would be effected through close collaboration between National Spiritual Assemblies and the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office and Office of Public Information, and we also indicated that it would take some time before these Offices would be prepared to initiate communications with you concerning the details of the plans to be pursued. Our purpose in writing to you now is to say that the United Nations Office will shortly launch its first coordinated program of diplomatic work in accordance with the strategy. The program will be concerned with human rights education. In anticipation of this initial effort, the House of Justice wishes us to convey the following.

253.2 As you know, the external affairs work falls into two main categories: diplomatic and public information. The emphasis of the United Nations Office, as distinct from that of the Office of Public Information, will be on the plans to be executed by your Assemblies towards building effective relations with your governments and influencing official attitudes and policies on matters of global, rather than of strictly national, importance. The efforts thus required necessitate the exercise of skills and approaches similar to those employed in the campaign to defend our persecuted coreligionists in Iran and other countries. The obvious difference with the external affairs strategy is that your concentration will be on promoting the interests of society as a whole and not on calling attention to a need to assist the Bahá'í community.

Important as is the external affairs work, occupation with it must not be allowed to detract from the major aim of the Four Year Plan: namely, to advance the process of entry by troops. The House of Justice has already encouraged you to devise channels through which you may carry out this work—either by the formation of committees, the setting up of offices, the assignment of tasks to capable individuals, or some combination of these. Since the activities involved are not of a kind that can be undertaken by members of the community in general, but must be engaged in by a relatively few individuals of the proper aptitude, stature and means, you can fulfill the diplomatic requirements of the external affairs strategy without diverting attention from the teaching work. Training will no doubt have to be given to some of the individuals you appoint; this is a matter about which the United Nations Office will advise you as necessary. ^{253.3}

A number of you have already made significant advances in this special field, and the House of Justice confidently and with great anticipation looks forward to the progress to be attained as you enter into a new phase of collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office. ^{254.4}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

254

Martyrdom of Two Believers in Iran

18 AUGUST 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is with much sadness that the Universal House of Justice has received the disturbing news that two more believers in Iran have been killed because of their Faith. While you may share this information with your community, no action should be taken at this time to publicize it in the media. ^{254.1}

Mr. Masha'llah Enayati (Maṣḥá'lláh 'Ináyatí), a 63-year-old Bahá'í resident of Ṭíhrán, who was well known for having constantly taught the Faith in a bold and zealous manner, died on 4 July 1997 after being severely beaten while in custody. During a visit to his native village of Ardistán to attend the meeting held to commemorate the anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Mr. Enayati was arrested in circumstances ^{254.2}

which are not clear. He was taken to prison in Iṣfahán, where he was severely beaten on all parts of the body. It appears that he was held in prison for about a week before being taken to a hospital. His daughter, who lives in Australia, was in Iran at the time and visited her father in the hospital, where he was still under armed guard, though it was only a minor matter for which he had been arrested. She witnessed the effects of the beating, including visible bruising all over his body and especially on his hands, which were black from his injuries. She reports that he was in good health before his arrest. Mr. Enayati passed away in the hospital. The Friends in Iran have added that Mr. Enayati's death certificate is worded in a most unusual way, suggesting that the doctor may himself have been under threat and thereby pressured to falsify the certificate. Under "cause of death" is entered, "Will be known later," in the handwriting of the doctor.

254.3 Mr. Shahram Reza'i (Shahrám Riḏá'í), a young Bahá'í man who was serving as a conscript in the army near the city of Rasht, was shot in the head by his weapons training officer on 6 July 1997 and died the following day. In court the officer claimed that the shooting was an accident. He was released after a few days, once the court established that the man killed was a Bahá'í. The court excused the officer of paying the blood-money normally required in such instances, ordering him to pay just the cost of the three bullets used to kill Mr. Reza'i. The Friends in Iran have no doubt that this was a case of deliberate murder and predicted before the "trial" that the officer would be released, since this has been so in other similar cases. We understand that Mr. Reza'i is the seventh Bahá'í undertaking compulsory army duties to have been killed by colleagues or officers.

254.4 Below is the provisional translation of the text of a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice for transmission to Iran:

254.4a The Universal House of Justice was grieved by the news of the sad events which engulfed the two lovers of the Abhá Beauty, Shahrám Riḏá'í and Mashá'lláh 'Ináyatí. These two trod the path of truthfulness and fearlessness and never concealed their relationship with the world-embracing Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh; this resulted in fueling the fire of prejudice amongst heedless individuals, and finally in leading the two to the exalted station of martyrdom and the attainment of the presence of the Desired One.

Kindly inform the families of these dear ones of the heartfelt sympathy of the House of Justice and assure them of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the two martyrs in the path of God and also for those oppressed ones who survive them. 254.4b

The willful killing of Mr. Enayati and Mr. Reza'i, occurring without any justification whatsoever, illustrates how the persecution of the believers in Iran is continuing to take place in various ways . . . 254.4c

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

255

Leadership of the Faith Following the Passing of the Guardian

6 JANUARY 1998

To an individual Bahá'í
Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 November 1997 and has asked us to provide you with the following reply. 255.1

The House of Justice appreciates your turning to it with your concerns about the absence of a Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi, and it stands ready to provide the clarifications required to assist you in resolving the issues troubling you. 255.2

As a well-deepened believer with a distinguished record of service to the Cause over many decades, you have undoubtedly made a careful study of the letters of 6 October 1963, 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966, and 7 December 1969, published in the volume *Messages from the Universal House of Justice—1963–1986*, which pertain directly to several of the issues to which you have referred in your letter. 255.3

An issue not directly discussed in these messages is that of the members of the family of Shoghi Effendi who were expelled from the Faith as Covenant-breakers, and their offspring. A detailed description of the faithlessness of this family has been provided in the book *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* by Adib Taherzadeh, a perusal of which provides a deeper insight into the events which prompted the following statement of Shoghi Effendi in a cable 255.4

of 5 April 1952: "TIME ALONE REVEAL EXTENT HAVOC WREAKED THIS VIRUS VIOLATION INJECTED FOSTERED OVER TWO DECADES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S FAMILY."

255.5 Unless they manifest evidence to the contrary, the children of the Covenant-breaking members of Shoghi Effendi's immediate family must necessarily be regarded as being infected with this spiritually contagious disease through their intimate association with their parents. Shoghi Effendi warned the believers about the propagation of Covenant-breaking attitudes through close family relationships in the following passage from a letter dated 18 August 1949 written on his behalf:

255.5a The friends are sometimes surprisingly naive and superficial in their approach to the subject of Covenant-breakers. They do not seem to understand that the descendants of Azal, with their mother's milk, drank hatred of Bahá'u'lláh, just as the descendants of Muḥammad-'Alí and his relatives have imbibed from babyhood a false concept of the Master. It takes practically a miracle to overcome this lifelong habit of wrong thought.

255.6 While this passage was written about the descendants of Mírzá Yaḥyá and Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, the insight it conveys is applicable also to the descendants of the Covenant-breakers in the family of Shoghi Effendi.

255.7 In your letter, you have referred to the possibility of a member of Shoghi Effendi's family expressing contrition and being admitted into the community. In principle, membership in the Bahá'í community is open to all such individuals who make application to the House of Justice and who are found, following investigation carried out with the assistance of the Counselors or their deputies, to be free of the spirit of Covenant-breaking. Thus the only barrier to the entry into the Faith of the members of the family of Shoghi Effendi, or indeed any of the descendants of Bahá'u'lláh, is their own attitude to the provisions of the Covenant.

255.8 Since the central element of your concern is that of the exercise of the functions of Guardian of the Cause, you should note that a distinction must be made between the possible reinstatement of members of Shoghi Effendi's family and the designation of another Guardian of the Cause. You are well familiar with the provisions in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Guardian's appointment of a successor. The House of Justice pointed out in its letter of 9 March 1965 that:

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.²⁵⁵⁻¹ 255.8a

The House of Justice's decision, which was announced on 6 October 1963, was that "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."²⁵⁵⁻² In addition, no believer, irrespective of his lineage or accomplishments, can now legitimately advance a claim to be the Guardian of the Cause, since 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated quite categorically: 255.9

. . . 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.²⁵⁵⁻ 255.9a

The House of Justice understands your distress at the absence of a Guardian, and at the consequent adjustments which were necessitated in the Administrative structure of the Faith. However, there should be no doubt about the ability of the Cause of God to accomplish its world-redeeming and world-transforming mission, despite the loss it suffered with the passing of Shoghi Effendi. Your attention is directed to the statement of the House of Justice on 9 March 1965, that: 255.10

255-1. MUHJ, no. 23.3.
 255-2. MUHJ, no. 5.1.
 255-3. MUHJ, no. 23.11.

- 255.10a 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.²⁵⁵⁻⁴
- 255.11 You may also obtain a deeper understanding of the prospects for the development of the Administrative Order by contemplating the guidance provided in the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian in August 1936:
- 255.11a The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh constitutes, indeed, the stage of maturity in the development of mankind. His appearance has released such spiritual forces which will continue to animate, for many long years to come, the world in its development. Whatever progress may be achieved in later ages—after the unification of the whole human race is achieved—will be but improvements in the machinery of the world. For the machinery itself has been already created by Bahá'u'lláh. The task of continually improving and perfecting this machinery is one which later Prophets will be called upon to achieve. They will thus move and work within the orbit of the Bahá'í Cycle.²⁵⁵⁻⁵
- 255.12 The House of Justice trusts that the clarifications set out in this letter will be of assistance to you. Should you find that aspects of this matter remain troubling, you should not hesitate to turn to it again. You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

255-4. MUHJ, no. 23.20.
255-5. DG, p. 61.

256

Message to the Latin American Youth Congress in Chile

6 JANUARY 1998

To the friends gathered at the Latin American Youth Congress in Chile
Dear Friends,

As the Cause of God advances resistlessly along the path traced out for it ^{256.1} by its Divine Founder, each stage of the process opens up to a new generation of Bahá'í youth challenges unique to the historical moment. Building on the accomplishments of the generations before, youth must devise ways to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. A discourse in consonance with the requirements of the time has to be refined, and activities aimed at transforming society have to be pursued with vigor.

To accomplish such tasks during the brief span of time afforded youth ^{256.2} requires resolve, spiritual discipline, energy, reliance on the power of divine assistance, and constant immersion in the Word of God. These efforts, which constitute an integral part of the growth processes of the Bahá'í community itself, nevertheless possess characteristics distinctly their own. In recent years, and in many parts of the world, Bahá'í youth have referred to their collective endeavors as a “youth movement,” a reminder that the energy being generated will not only bring new recruits from among their peers, but will move an entire generation one step closer to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Over the next few days you will be contemplating the special opportunities ^{256.3} which the Hand of Providence has laid before you. An essential component of any strategy you devise is training. In all your countries, this question is being enthusiastically addressed as institutes learn to operate with increasing effectiveness. You yourselves are participating, as students and as teachers, in building capacity in your communities to train thousands and thousands of believers, many of whom will be young people. With this vision in mind, you should devise actions, characteristic of your youth movement, in which your swelling numbers will engage. How will you teach the Cause and advance the process of entry by troops? How will you contribute to the establishment of a distinctly Bahá'í life? And how will you accelerate the transformation of Latin American society to achieve its high destiny? As you contemplate these questions, be assured that our prayers will surround you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

257

Acceptance of Decisions Made by the Local Spiritual Assembly

17 FEBRUARY 1998

To a Local Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

257.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 8 January 1998 in which you forwarded a question from one of the members of your Bahá'í community . . . regarding the recourse of the friends when they believe an Assembly has made an error. We are to reply as follows.

257.2 First, it is important to consider the unique nature of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and the responsibilities of the individuals and the institutions within it. As . . . is no doubt aware, in the Bahá'í system, the individual votes for the members of the Spiritual Assembly with the understanding that she or he is free to choose without any interference whomever his conscience prompts him to select, and freely accepts the authority of the outcome. Submission of the believers to the decisions of the Assembly is essential to the achievement and maintenance of unity within the community. 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 any Assembly decision which he conscientiously feels is unjust or detrimental to the community.

257.3 Concerning the accountability of the Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian in *God Passes By* (p. 331) wrote that the Assemblies are “invested with an authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them,” and that they are “solemnly pledged to follow, under all conditions, the dictates of the ‘Most Great Justice’ that can alone usher in the reign of the ‘Most Great Peace’ which Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and must ultimately establish.” The Assemblies are therefore responsible to God rather than to those who elect them.

257.4 The attitude of the believer towards the Assembly decisions should be one of wholehearted acceptance and support. If, however, the individual

feels that a decision is incorrect, he is free to bring additional information pertaining to the matter to the Assembly for its consideration. Should the decision remain unchanged, it is preferable if he accepts humbly the view of the Assembly in the spirit of sacrifice, and without further dispute. Then, as the Master has affirmed, any wrong decision will eventually be set right. When the believers act submissively and in the spirit of self-effacement it attracts the good pleasure of God, which in itself serves as a consolation to their hearts.

A believer who is distressed by the decision reached by an Assembly may well find comfort and reassurance in the following passage from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: 257.5

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. . . .²⁵⁷⁻¹ 257.5a

If, after taking all this into account, a believer is still unsatisfied with a decision of the Assembly, he can appeal, in the first instance, to his National Spiritual Assembly and ultimately to the Universal House of Justice. However, in so doing it is advisable to bear in mind that such a dissenting voice should make itself heard only within the proper administrative institutions and never elsewhere. Once such a case has been presented to the institutions it is no longer the responsibility of that individual and should be left in the care of those divinely ordained agencies. 257.6

The same appeal process applies to an individual who has lost his voting rights, should he feel that they have been unjustly removed. 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 257.7

257-1. LG, no. 283.

of voting rights is that the believer be sincerely repentant, as evidenced by his statement to that effect or by his demeanor and conduct.

257.8 The House of Justice hopes that the foregoing has sufficiently addressed . . . 's question and wishes to assure her of its love for her.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

258

Establishment of Three New National Spiritual Assemblies, Reestablishment of One National Spiritual Assembly

20 FEBRUARY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

258.1 Since the commencement of the Four Year Plan we have been greatly encouraged by the steady expansion of the Faith in many regions of the world and by the ongoing maturation of Bahá'í communities everywhere, and it is with joyful hearts that we announce the establishment next May of three new National Spiritual Assemblies and the reestablishment of another National Assembly:

258.2 The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sabah with its seat in Kota Kinabalu, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia.

258.3 The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sarawak with its seat in Kuching, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia.

258.4 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Slovakia with its seat in Bratislava, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Czech and Slovak Republics.

258.5 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Liberia, which circumstances have prevented from being reestablished since 1992, with its seat in Monrovia and its National Convention being organized by the Bahá'í Administrative Committee of Liberia.

258.6 The Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Czech and Slovak Republics, with its seat in Prague, will become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Czech Republic.

At this critical stage in human history, it is our hope that Bahá'ís everywhere will be inspired by the continuing development of the Administrative Order in these countries and territories. May the friends in every land recognize the opportunities that lie before them, and may they arise to teach the Cause of God with enthusiasm and love. ^{258.7}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

259

Review of Bahá'í Material Prior to Publication

4 MARCH 1998

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter . . . inquiring ^{259.1} about your review of music and special materials. . . . We are to convey the following reply.

The memorandum on Bahá'í publishing dated Riḍván 1971, which the ^{259.2} House of Justice sent to National Spiritual Assemblies, states that

At this early stage of the Cause all works by Bahá'ís which deal with the ^{259.2a} Faith, whether in the form of books, pamphlets, translations, poems, songs, radio and television scripts, films, recordings, etc. must be approved before submission for publication, whether to a Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í publisher. In the case of material for purely local consumption the competent authority is the Local Spiritual Assembly, otherwise the National Spiritual Assembly (through its Reviewing Committee) is the approving authority. ²⁵⁹⁻¹

The obligation, as indicated in this statement, of Spiritual Assemblies ^{259.3} to ensure the appropriateness of books, music and other items intended for dissemination in the interests of the Faith remains unchanged for the time

259-1. MUHJ, no. 94.

being; but it will have to be carried out with flexibility in the light of changing circumstances. The House of Justice recognizes that the volume and variety of materials being created have greatly increased with the growth in size of the Bahá'í community and the rapid advance and ease of use of communication and other technologies.

259.4 Applying review standards to manuscripts is, of course, relatively straightforward, whereas doing so with respect to different types of music and the wide range of items categorized as “special materials” poses a particular challenge to those responsible for reviewing them. Since the form, expression and effect of music are, to a great extent, determined by the cultural norms of a society, the reviewing agency called upon to decide on the acceptability of proposed musical items must be sensitive and flexible in its judgment. The value of having National and Local Spiritual Assemblies exercise such judgment is obvious in the fact that what may well be accepted as appropriate in one place may have the opposite effect in another. Moreover, an aspect of the flexibility called for is recognizing that all acceptable musical items are not suitable for all Bahá'í occasions. For example, a distinction must be made between the music employed for devotional services and that used for other occasions in the Bahá'í community.

259.5 Special materials, such as those listed in your letter (i.e. art prints, tee-shirts, cards, automobile bumper stickers, book marks, calendars, jewelry, and art work that includes the Greatest Name and the Ringstone symbol), are so numerous, so varied and, in many instances, so ephemeral, that it would be impossible for any national agency to cope with the demands for review of them all. It is necessary therefore that your National Assembly determine what types of items must be reviewed and by what standard. As for the others, you will have to allow some latitude in their production, while continuing to educate the friends as to the principles that should guide their creation of such items.

259.6 The House of Justice applauds your intention to mount an effort to educate the friends concerning the standards to be upheld in creating, publishing and distributing all kinds of materials involving the Faith and its symbols. In time, as the friends themselves increasingly exercise wise discrimination in choosing between appropriate and inappropriate items in circulation, the exertions of the institutions in promoting these standards will bring about the desired results.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

260

Passing of Hugh E. Chance, Former Member of the Universal House of Justice

26 MARCH 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

HEARTS HEAVY WITH SORROW AT PROFOUND LOSS TO BAHÁ'Í WORLD OF HUGH ^{260.1}
E. CHANCE, OUR DEARLY LOVED FORMER COLLEAGUE, STAUNCH, FAR-SIGHTED
SUPPORTER CAUSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. CONSTANT OPTIMISM, ADAMANTINE FAITH, IN-
DOMITABLE WILL CHARACTERIZED HIS NOTABLE THREE-DECADE-LONG SERVICES
AS MEMBER UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE SUBSEQUENT TO HIS MEMBERSHIP
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UNITED STATES. HIS MANIFOLD CONTRIBUTIONS
ORGANIZATION WORLD CENTER FAITH, HIS UNTIRING EFFORTS PROMOTE INTER-
ESTS CAUSE ESPECIALLY FAR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC REGIONS, HIS VIGOROUS AS-
SISTANCE DEVELOPMENT EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY HAVE LEFT IMPERISHABLE RECORD ACHIEVEMENTS. SUPPLICATING
ARDENTLY HOLY THRESHOLD THAT HIS NOBLE SOUL MAY REAP RICH REWARDS
ABHÁ KINGDOM, THAT HE MAY BE JOYOUSLY REUNITED HIS BELOVED WIFE MAR-
GARET, THAT HEARTS HIS DEAR DAUGHTER AND OTHER MEMBERS FAMILY MAY BE
SOLACED.

ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS IN HIS HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP ^{260.2}
AND THROUGHOUT BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

261

Passing of Florence Mayberry, Former Counselor and Member of the International Teaching Center

9 APRIL 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

DEEPLY SADDENED LOSS OUTSTANDING STAUNCH PROMOTER FAITH FLORENCE ^{261.1}
MAYBERRY. HER TIRELESS INSPIRED SERVICES, LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNA-
TIONAL, IN BOTH TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE FIELDS, SPANNING OVER FORTY
YEARS, CROWNED BY UNFORGETTABLE DECADE AS COUNSELOR MEMBER INTERNA-
TIONAL TEACHING CENTER. VALIANT DEFENSE COVENANT, UNFLAGGING EFFORTS

BLAZON NAME CAUSE, INTREPID FAR-FLUNG TRAVELS DISTINGUISH HER SPLENDID RECORD ACHIEVEMENTS. ASSURE FERVENT PRAYERS PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS SPIRIT. CONFIDENT BOUNTIFUL REWARDS ABHÁ KINGDOM.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

262
Request for Memorials
for the Passing of Florence Mayberry
10 APRIL 1998

To National Spiritual Assemblies in the Americas

^{262.1} Further to our message to all National Spiritual Assemblies about the passing of Mrs. Florence Mayberry, we request you to arrange befitting memorial meetings across your communities to honor her memory. Special meetings should be held in the Houses of Worship in Wilmette and Panama City for the same purpose.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

263
Riḍván Message 1998
RiḌVÁN 155

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

^{263.1} At this halfway mark in the Four Year Plan, we affirm with uplifted hearts that the worldwide Bahá'í community is breaking new ground at a dynamic stage in its evolution. The process of entry by troops, upon which its energies are focused, is clearly advancing.

^{263.2} Three developments brighten our expectations. One is in the solid results being produced wherever training institutes are in operation. Tens of thousands of individuals have over the last two years completed at least one institute course. The immediate effects upon them have been a greatly strengthened faith, a more conscious spiritual identity, and a deepened commitment to Bahá'í service. The second pertains to the notable improvement in the conditions affecting the establishment and renewal of Local

Spiritual Assemblies. The decision to form these institutions only on the first day of Rīḍvān, and to do so principally at the initiative of the communities to which they belong, was put into effect in 1997. While there was an immediate but not unexpected drop in the number of Local Assemblies worldwide, the decrease was not very large; in fact, increases were recorded in some countries. This outcome indicates that the process of maturation of these divinely ordained institutions is on course. The third is that a new confidence in teaching is stirring the friends, yielding impressive results in various regions. The potential for a steady and ever-expanding influx of new believers has always been great, and we are able to say with assurance that the capacity to actualize it is methodically being developed more than ever before with the prosecution of the current Plan.

Further to these signs of progress, we are gratified by the marvelous speed ^{263.3} with which the construction projects on Mount Carmel proceeded to fulfill the schedule which had been set for the year just ended. Immediately ahead are the establishment in May of three new National Spiritual Assemblies—Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia—and the reestablishment of the National Spiritual Assembly in Liberia, raising to 179 the pillars of the Universal House of Justice. In contemplating the divine favors being bestowed on our community, we acknowledge with deep gratitude the constancy of the acts of service being performed by the individual Hands of the Cause of God, by the International Teaching Center, and by the Counselors and their auxiliaries on all continents. The increasing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies also bolsters our certitude in the imminence of resounding victories.

Against this salutary picture of the community's prospects is the confused ^{263.4} background of a planet at odds with itself. And yet, amid the widespread desolation of the human spirit, it is apparent that at some level of consciousness there is among the peoples of the world a growing sense of an irresistible movement towards global unity and peace. This sense is being aroused as the physical barriers between peoples are being virtually eliminated by breathtaking advances in science and technology. Nevertheless, a mixed catalogue of world-shaking tribulations and world-shaping developments keeps humanity concurrently dazed and dazzled. The storms and stresses battering the social fabric are incomprehensible to all except the relatively few of the planet's inhabitants who recognize God's purpose for this Day.

Our fellow human beings everywhere are insensibly subjected at one and ^{263.5} the same time to the conflicting emotions incited by the continuous opera-

tion of simultaneous processes of “rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos.” These Shoghi Effendi identified as aspects of the Major Plan and Minor Plan of God, the two known ways in which His purpose for humankind is going forward. The Major Plan is associated with turbulence and calamity and proceeds with an apparent, random disorderliness, but is, in fact, inexorably driving humanity towards unity and maturity. Its agency for the most part is the people who are ignorant of its course and even antagonistic towards its aim. As Shoghi Effendi has pointed out, God’s Major Plan uses “both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfillment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.”²⁶³⁻¹ The acceleration of the processes it generates is lending impetus to developments which, with all the initial pain and heartache attributable to them, we Bahá’ís see as signs of the emergence of the Lesser Peace.

263.6 Unlike His Major Plan, which works mysteriously, God’s Minor Plan is clearly delineated, operates according to orderly and well-known processes, and has been given to us to execute. Its ultimate goal is the Most Great Peace. The four-year-long campaign, at the midpoint of which we have arrived, constitutes the current stage in the Minor Plan. It is to the achievement of its purpose that we must all devote our attention and energies.

263.7 At times it may seem that the operation of the Major Plan causes a disruption in the work of the Minor Plan, but the friends have every reason to remain undismayed. For they recognize the source of the recurrent turbulence at play in the world and, in the words of our Guardian, “acknowledge its necessity, observe confidently its mysterious processes, ardently pray for the mitigation of its severity, intelligently labor to assuage its fury, and anticipate, with undimmed vision, the consummation of the fears and the hopes it must necessarily engender.”²⁶³⁻²

263.8 Even a cursory survey of the global scene in recent years cannot but lead to observations fraught with special significance for a Bahá’í viewer. For one thing, amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistakable trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent

263-1. CF, p. 140.

263-2. PDC, ¶5.

months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies—a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of an organically unified world. But a development of even greater moment to the Bahá'í community is that a massive number of people are searching for spiritual truth. Several recently published studies have been devoted to this phenomenon. The ideologies that dominated the larger part of this century have been exhausted; at their waning in the century's closing years, a hunger for meaning, a yearning of the soul, is on the rise.

This spiritual hunger is characterized by a restlessness, by a swelling dissatisfaction with the moral state of society; it is also evident in the upsurge of fundamentalism among various religious sects, and in the multiplication of new movements posing as religions or aspiring to take the place of religion. Here are observations that enable one to appreciate the interaction between the two divinely propelled processes at work on the planet. The manifold opportunities thus providentially provided to present the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to searching souls create a dynamic situation for the Bahá'í teacher. The implications for the task at hand are immensely encouraging. 263.9

Our hopes, our goals, our possibilities of moving forward can all be realized through concentrating our endeavors on the major aim of the Divine Plan at its current stage—that is, to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This challenge can be met through persistent effort patiently pursued. Entry by troops is a possibility well within the grasp of our community. Unremitting faith, prayer, the promptings of the soul, Divine assistance—these are among the essentials of progress in any Bahá'í undertaking. But also of vital importance to bringing about entry by troops is a realistic approach, systematic action. There are no shortcuts. Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clearheaded, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act. 263.10

Towards ensuring an orderly evolution of the community, a function of Bahá'í institutions is to organize and maintain a process of developing human resources whereby Bahá'ís, new and veteran alike, can acquire the knowledge and capacity to sustain a continuous expansion and consolida- 263.11

tion of the community. The establishment of training institutes is critical to such effort, since they are centers through which large numbers of individuals can acquire and improve their ability to teach and administer the Faith. Their existence underscores the importance of knowledge of the Faith as a source of power for invigorating the life of the Bahá'í community and of the individuals who compose it.

263.12 The facts at hand confirm that the Four Year Plan works where a systematic approach is understood and applied. These same facts show that the institutions of the Faith, in their collaborative efforts at national, regional, and local levels, have clearly been adhering to this understanding. However, with individuals, on whom rests the ultimate success of the Plan, this understanding is less clear. For this reason, we must emphasize to our fellow-believers the importance to their individual effort of this prerequisite of success in teaching and in other undertakings.

263.13 As translated into programs and projects by national and local institutions, the Plan, among other things, gives direction, identifies goals, stimulates effort, provides a variety of needed facilities and materials to benefit the work of teachers and administrators. This is of course necessary for the proper functioning of the community, but is of no consequence unless its individual members respond through active participation. In so responding, each individual, too, must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá'í.

263.14 But beyond the necessity of responding to the call of the institutions, the individual is charged by Bahá'u'lláh Himself with the sacred duty of teaching His Cause, described by Him as the "most meritorious of all deeds." So long as there are souls in need of enlightenment, this duty must surely remain the constant occupation of every believer. In its fulfillment, the individual is directly responsible to Bahá'u'lláh. "Let him not wait for any directions," Shoghi Effendi urgently advises, "or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies."²⁶³⁻³ The writings of

263-3. ADJ, ¶177.

the Central Figures and of our Guardian are replete with advice and exhortations concerning the individual's irreplaceable role in the advancement of the Cause. So it is inevitable that we should feel impelled, at this particular time in the life of humanity as a whole, to appeal directly to each member of our community to ponder the urgent situation facing us all as the helpers of the Abhá Beauty.

Our lot, dear brothers and sisters, is to be consciously involved in a vast historic process the like of which has not ever before been experienced by any people. As a global community, we have, thus far, attained a unique and magnificent success in being representative of the full spectrum of the human race—thanks to the inestimable expenditure of life, effort and treasure willingly made by thousands of our spiritual forebears. There is no other aggregation of human beings who can claim to have raised up a system with the demonstrated capacity to unite all of God's children in one world-embracing Order. This achievement places us not only in a position of incomparable strength, but more particularly in one of inescapable responsibility. Does not every one of us therefore have a divine obligation to fulfill, a sacred duty to perform towards every other one who is not yet aware of the call of God's latest Manifestation? Time does not stop, does not wait. With every passing hour a fresh affliction strikes at a distracted humanity. Dare we linger? 263.15

In a mere two years the Four Year Plan will be concluded, just some months before the end of an unforgettable century. Looming before us, then, is a twofold date with destiny. In extolling the unprecedented potential of the twentieth century, the beloved Master averred that its traces will last forever. Seized with such a vision, the mind of the alert follower of the Blessed Beauty must undoubtedly be astir with anxious questions as to what part he or she will play in these few fleeting years, and as to whether he or she will, at the end of this seminal period, have made a mark among those enduring traces which the mind of the Master perceived. To ensure a soul-satisfying answer, one thing above all else is necessary: to act, to act now, and to continue to act. 263.16

Our heartfelt plea at the Holy Threshold on behalf of us all is that we may be divinely aided and richly confirmed in whatever we do towards meeting the urgent aim of the Divine Plan at so fate-laden a moment in human history. 263.17

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

264

Election of the Universal House of Justice

3 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

^{264.1} NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE 'ALI NAKHJAVÁNÍ, PETER KHAN, ADIB TAHERZADEH, GLENFORD MITCHELL, IAN SEMPLE, HOOPER DUNBAR, FARZAM ARBAB, DOUGLAS MARTIN, HUSHMAND FATHEAZAM.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

265

Message to the Conference of the Continental Counselors

3 MAY 1998

To the Conference of the Continental Counselors

Beloved Friends,

^{265.1} It has been barely two years and four months since you came together here at the outset of your current term of service. In our message to your conference at that time, we described in detail not only the purpose and structure of the Four Year Plan but the form in which it would have to be pursued if it was to realize its ambitious aim. You were then given the mandate to go forth and prepare the Bahá'í world to take on the challenges that lay ahead.

^{265.2} The extraordinary events of the Convention we have all just witnessed bear eloquent testimony to the ardor and effectiveness of your response. All of the institutions of the Faith have most certainly played their parts in moving our beloved Cause a giant step forward in this brief period. The clarity and vigor with which the National Spiritual Assemblies are addressing the tasks of the Plan reflect that dramatic advance in maturity that the Guardian encouraged us to expect in these closing years of the century. We feel compelled, however, to pay special tribute to the selfless, inspiring and intelligent contributions which you have made to this collective enterprise. Your work has brought honor to your institution and immense joy to our hearts.

^{265.3} As a result of your unceasing activity during the months immediately following the conference, the Bahá'í world had been made ready, by the

time it received our Riḍvān 1996 message, to enter into intensive detailed planning. And once national plans were formulated your efforts did not slacken; with equal vigor you and your auxiliaries galvanized the believers into systematic action and helped them to remain focused on the central aim of the Plan. We hope that you will convey to your Auxiliary Board members and their assistants our heartfelt gratitude.

The challenge which now faces the Bahá'í world is to take advantage of the momentum thus achieved. It has within its grasp the opportunity to multiply its human resources on a scale far beyond anything heretofore attained. Every measure must be taken to ensure that this possibility becomes a reality. Training must be offered widely, to contingents of newly enrolled and veteran believers alike. It is also imperative that the energies being generated and the skills being developed through training institute programs be channelled to serve directly the needs of the Plan. In short—without any delay—the work should move to the higher tempo that recent accomplishments make possible. 265.4

Your consultations this week need to be eminently practical. You come to them with a wealth of experience that the Bahá'í community has never before enjoyed. You are well aware of the diverse strengths of the communities you serve and of the efficacy of the methods being employed in the field. The lessons of these past two years need to be examined and correlated, and their implications for advancing the process of entry by troops must be understood. In this context, you will also have to consider the increased capacity of your own institution, the work of the Auxiliary Board members, and your interaction with them, with Spiritual Assemblies, and with the International Teaching Center, whose concern it is to reinforce your efforts with advice, perspectives and resources. 265.5

Dear friends! You represent an army of able and highly motivated servants of the Cause throughout the world. Yours is an institution which, in one respect, has a particularly intimate relationship with the Universal House of Justice; in another, it is able to exercise an influence that penetrates the very grass roots of the community. Its nature fits it, uniquely, to serve as a river of encouragement, example and love whose waters can refresh and invigorate the spirit of every believer they touch. 265.6

We will follow your consultations this week with the heightened hope and confidence which your impressive achievements to date have awakened. For your part, be sure of our ardent prayers that Bahá'u'lláh will bless your deliberations and confirm your efforts to help bring about the massive 265.7

increase in resources which the mission of our beloved Cause so urgently requires.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

266

Training Institutes

6 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{266.1} Enclosed is a copy of a document entitled “Training Institutes” which summarizes the guidance provided to date on this important subject. The document was made available to delegates at the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention, and the Universal House of Justice believes you will find it very helpful as a resource paper.²⁶⁶⁻¹

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

267

Appointment of Counselor Members to the International Teaching Center

13 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

^{267.1} WITH JOYFUL HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUSELOR MEMBERS INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1998: KISER BARNES, ROLF VON CZÉKUS, HARTMUT GROSSMANN, VIOLETTE HAAKE, FIRAYDOUN JAVAHERI, LAURETTA KING, JOAN LINCOLN, PAYMAN MOHAJER AND PENNY WALKER. PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL SHAPOOR MONADJEM, DONALD ROGERS, FRED SCHECHTER, KIMIKO SCHWERIN AND JOY STEVENSON FOR RECORD DISTINGUISHED SELF-SACRIFICING LABORS THIS VITAL INSTITUTION.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

266-1. The document entitled “Training Institutes” is published in *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material, 1996–2006* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2006).

268

Two Bahá'ís in Iran Sentenced to Prison

21 MAY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to share with you the enclosed Persian original and English translation of an extraordinary verdict handed down by Court of Appeals Number Eight for the Province of Khurásán, 18 September 1997, against two members of the Iranian Bahá'í community, Mr. Jamáli'd-Dín Hájípúr and Mr. Mañşur Mihrábí. Both defendants had appealed against sentences passed on them by the Revolutionary Court Number One in Bírjand, Iran, which had sentenced each of them to two years imprisonment and the confiscation of property. The appeals court upheld the decisions of the lower court. This document is being sent so that you may share it with your government and draw attention to those statements that indicate the atmosphere in which the Bahá'ís of Iran live. ^{268.1}

As with many other judgments by Iranian courts, the document provides further evidence that members of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran are being arrested and condemned solely because of their membership in what is described as “the wayward Bahá'í sect.” The statement in the verdict that “Bahá'ism is recognized as an illegal organization” makes a mockery of the Iranian regime's claim that Bahá'ís nevertheless retain their rights to the observance of their religious beliefs. Charges brought against the defendants mention that they have “regularly been holding Bahá'í Feasts and meetings on ‘Bahá'í Life,’” adducing such activities as evidence of criminal behavior, including “espionage” for the state of Israel. ^{268.2}

What is startling in the text of the judgment, however, is that it also accepts as evidence of illegal activity such actions of the two defendants as holding classes for Bahá'í youth in, respectively, English language studies and science and technology. The charges note, without apparent embarrassment on the part of the Iranian judicial authorities, that the two convicted persons carried out these activities “with the intention of improving the standard of education of Bahá'í students and their families.” The context in which the behavior of the defendants has to be seen derives, of course, from ^{268.3}

the fact that the Iranian regime has arbitrarily excluded Bahá'í students from higher education solely on grounds of their religious affiliation.

268.4 That senior Bahá'ís like the two defendants have been free to offer their services in this regard is, of course, the result of their having been dismissed—again solely on grounds of their religious affiliation—from their employment. The charges upheld by the appeals court leave no doubt on this point, noting in passing that Mr. Mihrábí had been dismissed from his position “as a result of the cleansing procedures.”

268.5 It will be apparent to your National Assembly that the persecution of Messrs. Hájípur and Mihrábí is part and parcel of the continuing attempt to suffocate the spiritual and community life of the Iranian believers, as called for in the secret memorandum endorsed by the Iranian Head of State, Ayatollah Khamenei, a copy of which was submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Commission by its Special Representative, Professor Reynaldo Galindo Pohl.

268.6 The general issue of the protection of the civil rights of the members of the Iranian Bahá'í community is under close and continuing scrutiny by the United Nations, the General Assembly having adopted, on 12 December 1997, a Resolution (52/142) calling unambiguously for the government of Iran to “implement fully the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on religious intolerance relating to the Bahá'ís . . . until they are completely emancipated.” Those recommendations included the restoration of the Bahá'í community's rights in the administration of its affairs and the rights of its youth to education. . . .

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

269

Formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Slovakia

23 MAY 1998

To the Bahá'ís of Slovakia

Dearly loved Friends,

The emergence of the independent National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Slovakia at the midpoint of the Four Year Plan is a cause of rejoicing for the whole Bahá'í world. It is the fruit of the self-sacrificing endeavors of the devoted believers, whether pioneers or native Czechs and Slovaks, who have raised up so many soundly based, spiritually motivated Bahá'í communities in the course of the past decade. And looking further back still, we see the foundations of these achievements in the travels of outstanding Bahá'í teachers such as Martha Root, in the extraordinary response of leading Czechoslovak statesmen to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and in the heroic steadfastness of the early believers who kept alive the spark of the Faith through so many dark years of suffering. ^{269.1}

You stand now on the threshold of challenging new developments in which you will contribute your special qualities to the advancement of the Cause of God in Europe as your national Bahá'í community grows in the number and diversity of believers and in the strength of its institutions. ^{269.2}

It is our fervent prayer in the Holy Shrines that the Slovak Bahá'í community, in close collaboration with the communities of the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Ukraine, will become a shining light in the heart of the European continent, shedding far and wide the illumination of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. ^{269.3}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

270

Deputization of Institute Teachers

1 JUNE 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

270.1 Recently a number of questions have been raised regarding the deputization of institute teachers and coordinators, and the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to bring to your attention the passage below from its Ridván 1996 message and to comment on it as follows.

270.1a “Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá'u'lláh thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation. . . .” Just as one deputizes another to teach in one's stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.²⁷⁰⁻¹

270.2 Referring to this passage in its letter of 6 August 1996,²⁷⁰⁻² the House of Justice informed the Bahá'í world of its decision to contribute US\$300,000 for the deputization of institute teachers, to be divided among the five Continental Funds, and expressed the hope that the friends, especially those with means, would follow suit and would give adequate attention to this area of urgent need. In that letter, it was indicated that the Counselors would be asked to keep their Auxiliary Board members apprised of the level of deputization required by institutes in various regions so that they could make this information available to those who wished to pursue this new possibility.

270-1. See no. 216, pp. 480–95.

270-2. See no. 231, pp. 546–47.

Clearly, the individual believer has a number of options available to him or her in complying with Bahá'u'lláh's injunction. Funds can be given directly to a specific believer who has been selected to act as one's deputy or can be contributed to one of the various Funds of the Faith, as mentioned above. However, for the deputization of institute teachers, the House of Justice wished to ensure that contributions and needs would be matched in such a way that national communities whose resources are meager would benefit from the assistance of those in communities with more resources at their disposal, whether in the same continent or another. Since the Continental Boards of Counselors are in the best position to know the needs of institutes in various regions, it was felt that contributing to the Continental Fund is an efficient way for an individual believer to perform this service. 270.3

With this in mind, the House of Justice requested the International Teaching Center to compile and organize the necessary information and to share it with all Counselors. Accordingly, the Teaching Center identified three figures around which the deputization needs worldwide seemed to be clustered: US\$1,200, US\$3,600 and US\$7,200 per staff member per year. It also drew up a list of countries, in groups by continent, where institute teachers and coordinators could benefit from deputization. It was suggested to the Counselors that they provide this list and the figures to the Auxiliary Board members to use in their consultations with those wishing to support one or more staff members of an institute for a given period of time, allowing the friends to choose the region to which their funds should be channelled. The Trustees of the Continental Funds were asked to see to it that the appropriate amounts would reach institutes in the designated regions. This scheme was approved by the Universal House of Justice, and it is envisioned that the Teaching Center will bring the list of countries up to date from time to time and revise the figures as necessary. 270.4

While the Auxiliary Board members are not being asked to solicit funds, they are expected to go beyond the general promotion of deputization among the believers and to discuss the specific details with them when it is appropriate to do so. The arrangements needed to ensure that the contributions reach the proper Continental Funds vary from country to country. Therefore, you may wish to consult with the Counselors to determine what measures can be taken to advance this important endeavor in your community. 270.5

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

271

Passing of Peter Vuyiya, Former Counselor Member of the International Teaching Center

8 JUNE 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

- 271.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED PASSING PETER VUYIYA NOBLE-HEARTED, SPIRITUALLY MOTIVATED, DEDICATED SERVANT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. HIS SEVERAL DECADES LOYAL SERVICE, INCLUDING MEMBERSHIP SUCCESSIVELY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY KENYA, BOARD OF COUNSELORS AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER HOLY LAND, BEAR ELOQUENT TESTIMONY STERLING QUALITIES WHICH CHARACTERIZED HIGHLY VALUED EFFORTS THIS DISTINGUISHED PROMOTER FAITH BLESSED BEAUTY. PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM.
- 271.2 URGE ALL NATIONAL COMMUNITIES AFRICA HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS HONOR. NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA CALLED UPON HOLD MEMORIAL SERVICE IN HOUSE OF WORSHIP. MAY AFRICAN BAHÁ'Í YOUTH EMULATE EXAMPLE HIS SELFLESS SERVICES BELOVED CAUSE.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

272

Duties of the International Teaching Center

10 JUNE 1998

The International Teaching Center
Beloved Friends,

- 272.1 Twenty-five years have passed since the establishment of the International Teaching Center, during which time its structure, including that of the institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors, has been steadily consolidated. The Counselors and their auxiliaries have assumed their responsibilities for the protection and the propagation of the Faith with increasing vigor. Their role in the advancement of the Cause, whether through contacts with the individual believers or consultations with Assemblies, has been crucial, and the animating influence of their institution can now be felt in every area of Bahá'í endeavor. The contributions they are making to the execution of the Four Year Plan are ample evidence of the maturation

taking place. This impressive record stands as a testimony to the diligence and wisdom with which the Teaching Center has guided their efforts.

The enclosed overview of the duties assigned to your institution, expressed in broad terms, will provide the general framework for your operations. The focus of your work will, of course, be determined by the specific requirements of the Faith at any given period in its development. 272.2

In the matter of protection, the current procedures for determining the expulsion and reinstatement of Covenant-breakers remain unchanged, and you will continue to exercise the responsibility for evaluating the reports of the Counselors and submitting your decision in each case to us for our consideration and approval before it is announced. 272.3

In recent years, opposition to the Cause has taken forms unfamiliar to the Bahá'í community, and this poses new challenges to your institution. You will have to take measures to help the Counselors to develop, in collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies, the ability to detect these subtle attacks and to counter their negative influence. In this connection, their efforts to encourage promising young scholars and promote within the Bahá'í community an appropriate appreciation of intellectual attainment will represent yet another invaluable service to the Cause. 272.4

In the field of propagation, during the first two years of this term, you need to center your energies on the prosecution of the Four Year Plan. This is a decisive moment in the history of the world and in the fortunes of the Faith, and it is apparent that the Bahá'í community has become endowed with a new strength. The Bahá'ís of the world have their eyes fixed on one single aim. In order to significantly advance the process of entry by troops, they have been asked to concentrate on the discharge of two immediate tasks: to multiply the human resources of the Cause on an unprecedented scale and, in ever-increasing numbers, to devote themselves to teaching. Since the commencement of the Plan, the friends everywhere have been laboring assiduously, acquiring the powers needed to accomplish these tasks. Through the imaginative use of the means at your disposal, you will be able to reinforce their exertions and ensure that they forge ahead with vision and resolve. 272.5

To this end, it will be important for the Teaching Center to keep careful watch over the progress being made worldwide, analyzing the situation of the Faith region by region and, if necessary, in specific countries. In this way, you can determine the extent to which the capacity of each national community to promote the process of entry by troops is be- 272.6

ing developed and exercised. You will be able to identify specific needs, for example, in the strengthening of institutes, in the implementation of teaching projects, and in the production and distribution of literature, and to respond to them by making recommendations to us, offering advice to the Counselors, deploying pioneers and traveling teachers, and disbursing financial resources.

272.7 Throughout the world, evidences multiply of a new energy at work in the life of the Cause. You have every reason to feel confident of the ability of your institution to help the friends seize the extraordinary possibilities thus opening before them. Be sure of our ardent prayers that Bahá'u'lláh will confirm you in this great endeavor.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

**OVERVIEW OF DUTIES EXERCISED
BY THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER
UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE**

- 272.7a • To exercise full responsibility for coordinating, stimulating and directing the Continental Boards of Counselors, acting also as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice.
- 272.7b • 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.
- 272.7c • To watch over the security and ensure the protection of the Faith of God. To investigate all cases of incipient Covenant-breaking, employing, as necessary, the services of the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries. To evaluate the reports rendered by the Continental Counselors and to decide whether the offender should be expelled from the Cause, submitting the decision to the Universal House of Justice for its consideration, consultation with the Hands of the Cause of God, and approval before an announcement is made. To follow a similar procedure for the reinstatement of a contrite Covenant-breaker.
- 272.7d • To be attentive to the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community, strengthening the believers to resist the influence of both internal and external enemies and ensuring, to this end, that the Continental Counselors assist National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in

- dealing with questions that cast doubt on the integrity of the Faith and its teachings.
- To be alert to possibilities for the expansion of the Faith, the consolidation of its institutions and the development of Bahá'í community life, analyzing such possibilities in the context of global plans, fostering consultation among the believers and their institutions on the nature and methods of sustained processes of growth, anticipating needs worldwide, and ensuring that the necessary resources become available to national communities. To give particular attention to the development of human resources, helping national communities increase their capacity to endow growing contingents of believers with spiritual insights, knowledge of the Faith, and skills and abilities of service. 272.7e
 - To administer a budget provided from the Bahá'í International Fund, allocating therefrom monies for the development of institutes, the implementation of various types of teaching projects, and the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual materials, as well as the operations of the Continental Boards of Counselors. To also administer the expenditure of the International Deputization Fund and to see to it that pioneers and traveling teachers are deployed in areas of need, with the help of the Continental Pioneer Committees, whose work it directs. 272.7f

273

Reaching the Age of Spiritual Maturity

16 JUNE 1998

To two individual believers

The Universal House of Justice has received your email message of 5 April 1998 regarding the responsibility of parents for their children's behavior, and we have been asked to convey the following. 273.1

While some opportunities for service in the Administrative Order are clearly reserved for those who are over twenty-one years of age, at age fifteen the individual has the privilege of affirming, in his own name, his faith in Bahá'u'lláh. The importance of attaining spiritual maturity at the age of fifteen is that it marks that point in life at which the believer takes into his own hands the responsibility for his spiritual destiny. 273.2

273.3 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:

273.3a 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.²⁷³⁻¹

While parents may grieve at some of the choices their children make, at the age of maturity a son or daughter is then essentially responsible for the decisions he or she takes and becomes answerable to God accordingly. Parents should continue in every way possible to help, encourage, and guide their children, but they should recognize clearly the basic change in accountability that has occurred.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

274

Appointment of Continental Counselors

17 JUNE 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

274.1 JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT FOLLOWING CONTINENTAL COUNSELORS TO FILL VACANCIES CREATED BY RECENT APPOINTMENTS TO INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER: IN AFRICA GARTH POLLOCK, IN THE AMERICAS ANTONIO GABRIEL MARQUES FILHO, IN ASIA NIDAVANUR BASKARAN, IN AUSTRALASIA MANIJEH REYHANI.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

273-1. MUHJ, no. 426.3a.

275

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Establishment of the International Teaching Center

2 JULY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dearly loved Friends,

Twenty-five years have now elapsed since the establishment of the ^{275.1} International Teaching Center announced in our message of 5 June 1973.²⁷⁵⁻¹ These years have seen the progressive unfoldment of the duties of this cardinal institution of the Cause of God, and the development of its close interaction with the Universal House of Justice on the one hand and the Continental Boards of Counselors on the other. During the five years just completed, it exercised increased responsibility in relation to the protection of the Faith. It stimulated pioneering and travel-teaching, as well as the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual aids and, after the launching of the Four Year Plan, it imparted a fundamental impetus to the establishment and sound functioning of training institutes. Suffusing all these activities has been its continuous interaction with the Continental Boards of Counselors, through whom its influence and encouragement have reached all levels and every area of the Bahá'í world community.

On 23 May 1998 the International Teaching Center entered upon a five-^{275.2} year period full of promise for the speedy advancement of the process of entry by troops into the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. On the morning of Saturday 13 June, the newly appointed members having arrived from their far-flung homelands, all the Counselor members of the Teaching Center met in Bahjí with the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and 'Alí Akbar Furútan, and the members of the Universal House of Justice, for prayer at the Sacred Threshold of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. There followed a week of intense consultation and preparation for the next phase of their work, focused on the prosecution of the second half of the Four Year Plan.

It is our ardent prayer in the Holy Shrines that as the edifices which are ^{275.3} the Seats of the Institutions of the Faith at its World Center rise before the public gaze on the slope of Mount Carmel, and the influence of the

275-1. MUHJ, no. 131.

institutions of its Administrative Order becomes more potent in every land, so the ears of mankind will become attuned to the glorious Message which the devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh are proclaiming and, on every side, the spiritually thirsty masses will rally to His Banner.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

276

Execution of Bahá'í in Iran

22 JULY 1998

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

276.1 With sorrowful hearts we have to inform you of the execution in Mashhad, Iran, of a Bahá'í, Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, in the early morning of 21 July 1998. We have been informed that Mr. Rawḥání's body was handed over to his relatives and was buried at 11:00 a.m. local time on the same day.

276.2 Mr. Rawḥání was fifty-two years old and was arrested on 20 September 1997, accused of converting a young woman from Islám to the Bahá'í Faith. The woman concerned denied that she had converted; she explained that her mother was a Bahá'í and that she herself had been raised as a Bahá'í. She was not arrested.

276.3 Mr. Rawḥání was kept incommunicado for the duration of his imprisonment; his family was not permitted to communicate with him, and no information is available regarding his treatment in prison. There is no evidence that Mr. Rawḥání was accorded any legal process, and no sentence was announced. It appears certain that he was not allowed access to a lawyer.

276.4 The night before his execution, someone from the Iranian Intelligence Department telephoned a Bahá'í in Mashhad stating that Mr. Rawḥání was to be executed the next day. Initially, the friends did not believe this statement, as they had experienced previous incidents when false statements were made to the Bahá'ís in an attempt to cause anguish. It was not until they were summoned to collect the body that they realized that the information had been correct.

276.5 You will recall that no Bahá'í had been executed since March 1992, and that the Government of Iran has been indicating to the world that the situation regarding the Bahá'ís had changed. However, the execution of Mr.

Rawḥání causes grave concern that, whatever the official assertion of the Iranian Government, the Bahá'í community of Iran remains unprotected, and officials in that country can persecute the Bahá'ís at will and with impunity. . . .

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

277

Details Regarding Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, Bahá'í Martyr in Iran

22 JULY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Further to the circular letter of 22 July 1998 from the Universal House of Justice, informing National Spiritual Assemblies of the execution in Mashhad, Iran, of Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, we provide below information about him which has just been received from his close relatives in Australia. . . . 277.1

Mr. Rawḥání was a person of a deeply gentle and innocent character. 277.2 Indeed his family nicknamed him “Rúḥu'lláh the innocent.” He was the father of four children, sons aged 24 and 17, and daughters aged 22 and 9. His family, unable to obtain any information about his circumstances or state of health, have undergone intense suffering during his imprisonment.

Mr. Rawḥání was not a wealthy man. He made his living as a salesman 277.3 of medical supplies and health products, an occupation he engaged in for about twenty years. Approximately twelve years ago he was sentenced to a period of two years' imprisonment, because of his membership in the Bahá'í Faith, and to an additional one year's internal exile in the village of Najafábád, which he was not permitted to leave and where he had to report daily to the police.

After this period he returned to Mashhad to continue his profession. 277.4 About four years ago, his brother-in-law from Australia, who was visiting his ill father in Iran, saw Mr. Rawḥání. He said that the psychological suffering that Mr. Rawḥání had undergone in his earlier imprisonment was clearly evident in his face. His children were also affected by the suffering imposed on their father. Just prior to his arrest in September 1997, the family had decided to move to Işfahán, as Mr. Rawḥání had found it increasingly difficult to make a satisfactory living in Mashhad. On the day of the family's intended departure, revolutionary guards came to their home and arrested

him. From that time, the family had seen Mr. Rawḥání only once—about a month after he was arrested—after which the authorities refused to give them any information about his situation, or even to tell them whether he was alive or dead.

277.5 This changed on Monday last, when the family were informed that they could see him for one hour. It is understood that this meeting was the first time that Mr. Rawḥání had breathed fresh air in three months. The next day the family were called to the prison to collect his body. They were given only one hour to bury their loved one, despite their appeal for more time to enable other relatives to attend the funeral. From the marks of a rope on his neck, it appeared that Mr. Rawḥání had been executed by hanging.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

278

Imprisonment of Four Bahá'ís in Iran

28 JULY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

278.1 You may have seen the BBC Newsfile report that on 26 July 1998 Radio Tehran and Iranian television quoted the President of the Tehran Revolutionary Tribunal, Mr. Gholam-Hossein Rahbar-Pour, as saying, “Essentially, none of the branches of the court has issued a death sentence for a person named Ruhollah Rowhani, affiliated to the Bahá'í sect. The report of his execution is a total lie.” The report goes on to say, “None of Iran’s provincial revolutionary courts had issued such a sentence either, he added.” A similar release was made by Agence France Presse. This statement by a leading representative of the Iranian judiciary is very significant, in that it conforms to the Islamic Revolutionary Government’s normal practice of denying that the Bahá'ís are persecuted in Iran.

278.2 Contrary to the statement of Mr. Rahbar-Pour, the facts are as stated in our previous letters about the execution of Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, namely that he was arrested in Mashhad in September 1997 on the specious charge of having converted a young Muslim, was held in solitary confinement for almost the whole of his detention, and was executed on 21 July 1998, the day after his family had been permitted to visit him for the first time since

October the previous year. The family was summoned to collect his body and required, despite their protests, to complete the burial within one hour, under the supervision of the Intelligence Department.

It has since been established that the authorities gave the family no documentation about Mr. Rawḥání—no court verdicts or death or burial certificates. His death certificate was seen, however, and on it was written that the cause of death was suffocation. A security officer tore up this certificate in front of the family, and arranged for another doctor to write a new death certificate, giving the cause of death as internal disease. 278.3

The House of Justice was also informed a short time ago that the trial of four Bahá'í prisoners in Mashhad—Mr. Sírús Dhabíhí-Muqaddam, Mr. Hidáyat-Káshifí Najafábádí, Mr. 'Aṭá'u'lláh Ḥamíd Naṣírízádih and Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání—took place in the month of Bahman (January/February) this year, and that they were all sentenced to death. The Supreme Court in Tehran confirmed the death sentence only in the case of Mr. Rawḥání, and, for technical reasons, returned the cases of the other three to Mashhad for a retrial, which took place on 29 April. The prisoners were not permitted to hire their own lawyers, but their defense was presented by one appointed by the court. The prisoners objected to some of the statements of the advocate on their behalf, and a heated argument between him and the prisoners took place in court. The prisoners were told that the verdict of the court would take about three months to be issued. 278.4

The families of the three prisoners were recently given permission to visit them every second Tuesday. The date of the next scheduled visit is 28 July. The families are greatly concerned that what happened with Mr. Rawḥání may happen with these prisoners—he was executed the day after the family visit. The Intelligence Department brought the three prisoners to the memorial service for Mr. Rawḥání. This was a most unusual thing to have happened, and it is feared that it may also be an indication that they may expect the same fate. . . . 278.5

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

279

**Visit by Representative of the
Bahá'í International Community to the
United Nations to the Pacific Islands**

29 JULY 1998

The National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of the Cook Islands, the Eastern Caroline Islands, the Fiji Islands, Kiribati, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Western Caroline Islands

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

279.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following message which requires your immediate attention.

279.2 Ever since the Peace Statement was released in 1985, the House of Justice has entertained the hope that leaders in the Pacific Region would, in a joint effort, take initiatives towards the realization of world peace. This expectation was brightened by the immediate, positive responses the Peace Statement received from two leaders, Sir Thomas Davis of the Cook Islands and the late President Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands, both of whom subsequently visited the Bahá'í World Center. One of the purposes of the establishment some time ago of the Bahá'í International Community office in the Pacific was to encourage these leaders towards constructive endeavors of global significance, but, alas, for a number of reasons it was not possible to sustain the activities of that office. However, this purpose need not be abandoned.

279.3 The House of Justice has decided to send an emissary to call on key leaders of your countries, particularly heads of state, to emphasize their role in advancing the cause of peace. Mr. Giovanni Ballerio, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, is to undertake this mission. Following a briefing at the Bahá'í World Center, he will travel directly to the Pacific region, beginning his itinerary in Western Samoa on 9 September and ending it in Palau on 22 December 1998.

279.4 You are each urgently and warmly requested to take the following action. Arrange an appointment for Mr. Ballerio to meet your head of state during the period of his stay in your country, as indicated in the enclosed schedule.

Give as your reason for requesting such an appointment that a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, who is based in Geneva, will be traveling in the Pacific area at the request of the Universal House of Justice, the head of that Community; and he has been asked by the House of Justice to seek an opportunity to convey its greetings to the head of state. If it can be arranged, a Continental Counselor will be present in your community so as to render any assistance that may be called for and, along with a member of your Assembly, to accompany Mr. Ballerio during his meeting with the head of state.

As a support to your own ongoing efforts to maintain good relations with your government, you should feel free to take advantage of Mr. Ballerio's presence in your country to arrange for him to meet with other high government officials, if time permits. 279.5

Mr. Ballerio will communicate directly with you concerning the particulars of his travel schedule and other relevant matters. 279.6

We are to assure you of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that your efforts to assist in this important activity may be abundantly confirmed by the Blessed Beauty. 279.7

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

280

Continued Persecution by Iranian Government of Bahá'ís in Iran

4 AUGUST 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has been informed by a number of National Spiritual Assemblies that the Iranian ambassadors in their respective countries have now acknowledged that Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, whose execution the Iranian authorities originally denied, was indeed hanged in Mashhad on 21 July 1998, as reported in our letter of 22 July to National Assemblies. The justification given for Mr. Rawḥání's brutal killing is that he was convicted of "criminal acts against national security." 280.1

As you are aware, the charge against Mr. Rawḥání and his long incarceration bore no relation to any question of national security; they arose out 280.2

of the accusation that he had converted a young Muslim woman to the Bahá'í Faith. This young woman has made it clear that she is not a religious convert, but was raised as a Bahá'í by her mother, who is herself a member of the Faith. It is reasonable to conclude that the sudden introduction of an entirely fictitious charge related to national security represents a belated attempt by Iranian authorities to fend off criticism from other governments, the media and human rights agencies, and to provide a plausible excuse for denying access to relevant information and documentation.

280.3 Included in the statements from the Iranian embassies is a report that Mr. Rawḥání had been arrested “for the same reasons” (i.e. violations of national security) twice before. . . . the facts of Mr. Rawḥání’s earlier two arrests leave no doubt as to how completely baseless are the charges now brought against his memory:

- 280.3a 1) Mr. Rawḥání was first arrested in 1984 as a former member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Cháhishk, a village near Mashhad. Although all Bahá'í administrative bodies had been dissolved in response to an order from Iran’s Attorney General in 1983, some forty friends, including Mr. Rawḥání, were arrested on the retroactive charge of having previously been members of Assemblies and Bahá'í committees in the Mashhad region. Mr. Rawḥání served more than a year in prison, over two years’ internal exile in Najafábád, near Iṣfahán, and was compelled to pay a fine of over one million rials before being permitted to return to his home.
- 280.3b 2) Mr. Rawḥání’s second arrest occurred approximately four years ago. With the dissolution of their administrative institutions, the believers found themselves having to make informal arrangements for the conduct of such purely religious activities as Nineteen Day Feasts, children’s classes, prayer meetings and the like. It was Mr. Rawḥání’s involvement in one such planning meeting that occasioned his second arrest. He, like all the others taken into custody on that occasion, was released after twenty-four hours.

280.4 Until recently, the Iranian authorities have done relatively little to conceal the fact that Bahá'ís are arrested, tried, sentenced and punished solely on the grounds of their religious beliefs and activities. The text of the judgment of the appeals court in the cases of Mr. Jamáli'd-Dín Ḥájípur and Mr. Maṣṣúr Míhrábí, forwarded to you with our letter of 21 May 1998, makes it clear that the official position of the government of Iran and its

courts is that the Bahá'í religion is itself “an illegal organization” and that a person’s membership in it makes him or her, by definition, liable to criminal charges. The proceedings against Messrs. Rawḥání, Ḥájípúr and Mihrábí make a mockery of the Iranian Government’s assurances that, even though the Bahá'í Faith is not one of the religions recognized in the constitution of that country, Iranian Bahá'ís nevertheless retain the right to the observance of their religious beliefs. Activities such as “holding Bahá'í Feasts and meetings on ‘Bahá'í Life’” are brazenly adduced as evidence of criminal behavior, including “espionage” for foreign governments.

It may be noted in passing that these shameless proceedings in Iranian courts against Bahá'í citizens of the country violate fundamental provisions of Iran’s Constitution, which guarantees written charges, the selection of legal representation, public trial, and verdicts which are reasoned and documented “with reference to the articles and principles of the law in accordance with which they are delivered.” . . . 280.5

In view of the efforts of Iranian diplomatic spokesmen to suggest some significance in the fact that a Bahá'í like Mr. Rawḥání has been arrested several times . . . most of the people arrested with Mr. Rawḥání on earlier occasions have likewise been arrested for a second or third time. The reason is related to the point made in our letter of 21 May 1998 that the province of Khurásán (whose capital is Mashhad) appears to have been selected as one of those regions in which a policy of particularly severe intimidation is being pursued. Random arrests and imprisonment of believers who are seen as active in encouraging the religious life of the friends are apparently aimed at generating fear in the community as a whole. Alas, it now seems not unlikely that, as this intimidation had failed to produce any significant effect, the hanging of Mr. Rawḥání was decided upon as a demonstration of the seriousness of the authorities’ determination to pursue the goals exposed in the secret document drawn up in 1991 by the Supreme Revolutionary Council. 280.6

The current campaign of disinformation being carried on by Iranian embassies increases our concern about the safety of Mr. ‘Aṭá’u’lláh Ḥamíd Naṣírízádih, Mr. Sírús Dḥabíḥí-Muqaddam and Mr. Hidáyat-Káshifí Na-jafábádí, who were likewise sentenced to death in Mashhad and are now awaiting their fate after a farcical “retrial.” 280.7

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

281

Bahá'í Sacred Literature in Simplified English

12 AUGUST 1998

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

281.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to . . . reply to your letters . . . elaborating your previously expressed views concerning your feeling of a need for Bahá'í sacred literature in simplified English, and we are to convey the following.

281.2 The House of Justice fully appreciates that the real purpose of your letters is to find a way to help the largest number of people, whatever their ability in English, to experience the Word of God as brought by Bahá'u'lláh; and it sympathizes with your desire to make the Teachings accessible to those who are not adept at reading English. Undoubtedly, a great deal can be done to fulfill your desire; however, it is important for you to understand basically that the standard of presentation of the divine Word cannot be lowered, and that it must be made available to all, including those who cannot read it in its elevated style. No simplification of language can take its place.

281.3 Even an unlettered person is capable of responding to the exalted language of the Holy Scriptures, as it is the inner spirit of the divine Texts that touches the heart. Bahá'u'lláh states in a well-known Tablet that, "The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. . . . The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked."²⁸¹⁻¹ Hearts become attracted and souls confirmed through the mysterious effects of exposure to the living Word—that Word which has demonstrated the power to stimulate intellectual development. You yourself have mentioned that a mystical experience enabled you to persevere in learning to understand the divine Texts.

281.4 You write that the people who you are trying to reach are not well educated and thus not able to comprehend the language of the Writings. It is not the prerogative of anyone to judge what another individual is capable of understanding from the Word of God. Consider, for instance, that throughout

281-1. TB, p. 173.

the world millions of Christians, from all walks of life, have for generations derived spiritual sustenance from the King James Bible. The publication of the Bible in simplified English is a relatively recent development and coincides with a period in which Christian organizations have lost much of their historical vitality; it also coincides with the lamentable decline in the standard of English usage in the United States and other English-speaking countries. An even more potent example relates to Islám, many generations of the adherents of which, literate or illiterate, have memorized all or large portions of their Holy Book, the Qur’án; it would be unthinkable to such believers to be presented with the proposition of simplifying the language of Muḥammad’s Revelation.

The House of Justice does not want to see a dilution of the standard of English translation of the Writings established by Shoghi Effendi. Regarding such translations, it is suggested that you may find it illuminating to read the two paragraphs in the introduction to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas . . . concerning “the style of language in which the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has been rendered into English.”²⁸¹⁻²

The matter of Englishing certain Arabic or Persian terminologies has been and will continue to be given attention by the House of Justice. For instance, it has already decided that terms and place names, like Teheran and Shiraz, which have recognized spellings in languages using the Roman alphabet, need not appear in their transliterated forms as Ṭihrán and Shíráz in materials intended for general distribution among non-Bahá’ís.

It is of course understood that some people do not have the vocabulary to read literature of a certain level. It is possible, therefore, to accompany the Texts with explanatory material. If, in this context, you wish to pursue your question further, you will have to take it up with your National Spiritual Assembly and abide by its advice.

As you strive to deepen your knowledge of the Faith and to serve its vital interests, be assured of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you may be divinely assisted and confirmed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

281-2. KA, p. 10.

282

Release of a Compilation on the Arts

19 AUGUST 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

282.1 The reference in the Ridván 153 B.E. message of the Universal House of Justice concerning the importance of the arts has encouraged the friends in many countries to initiate and pursue activities to use various forms of art in promoting the teaching work. A number of Spiritual Assemblies and friends also suggested that a compilation on the subject be prepared. This request was approved by the House of Justice and a compilation entitled *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* has been completed by the Research Department, and a copy is enclosed herewith. The House of Justice leaves it to your discretion to determine how best its contents may be shared with the friends under your jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

283

Clarification on the Role of the Universal House of Justice

27 AUGUST 1998

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

283.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following reply to your letter . . . seeking clarification on the “interpretative function” of that institution. . . .

283.2 In the light of the Teachings which are well known to you, and given the repeated statements of the House of Justice on this subject, it is not correct to insist that the House of Justice has an interpretative function. This matter has been dealt with in three published letters, dated 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966 and 7 December 1969, appearing in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963–1986* (U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust). A careful study of these letters can provide you with the answers you seek. However, the

House of Justice is happy to offer some further comments for your consideration.

Any reference to authoritative or binding interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture is a reference to the divinely guided meaning given to such Scripture by either 'Abdu'l-Bahá or the Guardian, the two persons authorized in the sacred Texts to interpret the Teachings. With regard to Shoghi Effendi, your letter cites a passage from the 9 March 1965 letter of the House of Justice which says: "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.'" In keeping with its legislative function the House of Justice exercises the role of elucidation based on passages in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and statements in the writings of the Guardian. For example, '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. . . .
(*Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 20)

Further, in response to a question raised by a 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. . . .
(Published in *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 47)

The meanings of the terms "elucidation" and "interpretation," as they are used with regard to the functions of Bahá'í institutions, should not of

course be confused with each other. 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; and in this context it offers explanations. 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. The major distinction between the two functions of elucidation and interpretation, to repeat the point differently, 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.

283.6 While the House of Justice does not interpret, it makes deductions on the basis of the revealed Texts and their authorized interpretations. This is clearly indicated in the following statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

283.6a Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, 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.

(Published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1968*
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 86)

In the normal use of the term, interpretation is the natural activity of an intelligent mind. As has been stated on previous occasions in the communications of the House of Justice, there is 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 contention ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions. 283.7

As to your reference to the perception of certain scholars that the opinions of the House of Justice are neither binding nor authoritative, the following words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are illuminating: 283.8

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 Abhá Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone. 283.8a

(Published in *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963–1968*

(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 84–5)

The House of Justice trusts that these comments will assist you to arrive at the clarification you seek, and it assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf. 283.9

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

284

Arrests, Imprisonment, and Confiscation of Property of Bahá'ís in Iran

24 SEPTEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

284.1 The Universal House of Justice is pleased to notify you that it has been informed of the release from prison of Mr. Mansur Mehrabi (sometimes referred to as Mehrabkhani), who was arrested in Birjand, Khurasan, on 19 May 1997. The number of Bahá'ís now known to be in prison in Iran by reason of their Faith is thirteen.

284.2 The House of Justice has, however, received more disquieting news from Iran. In Bujnurd, northern Khurasan, three friends, Mrs. Nahid Sabeti, Mr. Manouchehr Sharifi and Mr. Hushmand Sanani, were arrested last week for participating in Bahá'í "Family Life" gatherings. After spending six days in prison, they were released, having been given suspended sentences of five years' imprisonment. The Friends in Iran feel that this use of suspended sentences is a new tactic devised by the Ministry of Information (Intelligence) to prevent Bahá'ís from participating in monthly religious gatherings. It is a threatening device, and the Bahá'ís in Iran are fearful that it may be extended to other parts of the country if allowed to go unchallenged. As has been the recent practice of the Government of Iran, no written documentation relating to the arrest or punishment of the friends has been provided to them.

284.3 The House of Justice has also been informed that another three Bahá'í homes in Yazd and one in Ardakan have been confiscated because their owners were members of the Bahá'í community. It may be noted that, despite the efforts of the governments of some countries to bring influence to bear on the Government of Iran, the hardship meted out to the Bahá'ís of Iran continues unabated, and in places like Yazd the confiscation of Bahá'í houses and properties is routinely pursued.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

285

Two Bahá'ís Imprisoned in Iran Sentenced to Death

29 SEPTEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following 285.1
disturbing news about the friends in Iran.

Sentences of death have been communicated orally by prison authorities 285.2
in Mashhad to Messrs. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hedayat-Kashefi Najafabadi, two of the three Bahá'ís who were imprisoned and tried along with the recently executed Mr. Ruhollah Rohani, according to reports received at the Bahá'í World Center. The third Bahá'í, Mr. Ataollah Hamid Nasirizadeh, was condemned to 10 years' imprisonment and will be transferred to a prison in Kerman.

You may well recall that when a number of governments protested to 285.3
the Iranian Government regarding the execution on 21 July 1998 of Mr. Rohani, they also appealed for the safety of the other Bahá'í prisoners in Mashhad, and officials of some of these governments were given to understand from statements of Iranian officials that the Iranian authorities would not carry out any further executions.

. . . In his [Mr. Rohani's] case there was at first an official denial of his 285.4
execution, and then, when it was confirmed otherwise and the Iranian Government found itself confronted by worldwide protest, it excused its action by making the spurious accusation that he had acted against the security of the country. The rationale was that the nature of the case made it impossible for details to be revealed. In the current situation, no such chicanery on the part of Iranian authorities should be countenanced. The surreptitious manner in which the sentence of death was conveyed to Messrs. Moghaddam and Najafabadi by word of mouth, without any evident documentation, raises serious questions as to how the authorities intend to deal with international reactions. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

286

Details on Bahá'ís Imprisoned and Sentenced to Death in Iran

I OCTOBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

286.1 Further to our email of 29 September 1998 concerning the Bahá'ís in Iran who have been sentenced to death, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to provide the following background information to assist you in explaining to your government contacts and the media the sequence of events and their implications.

286.2 As you know, Mr. Ruhollah Rohani was executed in Mashhad under mysterious circumstances on 21 July 1998. The execution was carried out in secrecy on the very day after his wife had been invited to visit him in prison. No official announcement of his death was made, no document affirming the death sentence was produced, no document certifying the cause of his death was issued. It is known that he had faced trial in Branch 8 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad during the month of Bahman (January/February) of this year, as had three other Bahá'ís: Messrs. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Hedayat-Kashefi Najafabadi, and Ataollah Hamid Nasirizadeh. All four had been sentenced to death, but the verdict of the court in each case had to be submitted to the Supreme Court in Teheran for ratification. The Supreme Court reportedly confirmed the death sentence only in the case of Mr. Rohani, and, for technical reasons, returned the cases of the other three to Mashhad, this time to Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court, for retrial.

286.3 Whereas in the previous trial the prisoners had no lawyer to defend them, a lapse apparently noted by the Supreme Court, at the retrial a lawyer not approved by the defendants was assigned to them. The accused had vehemently objected to some of the statements of their defense counsel which appeared to prejudice their case. The prisoners were then told that the verdict of the court would be decided later. A few days ago, it was communicated orally to the prisoners that the death sentence has been confirmed in the cases of Messrs. Moghaddam and Najafabadi, and that Mr. Nasirizadeh has been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

286.4 The accused have been given a chance to appeal to the court that sentenced them. Therefore, the appeal will take place in the same Branch 3

of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad. The difference this time is that they will be permitted to engage their own lawyer. It is very difficult, of course, to find a lawyer who will take on this type of case, because Bahá'í lawyers are not permitted to practice in Iran; and in the rare instances in the past when Muslim lawyers have undertaken to defend Bahá'ís, they were subjected to harassment and abuse.

The nature of the defense that a lawyer can provide in such an appeal is also severely circumscribed. The lawyer is able to meet the defendants in prison and may be permitted to see the court file from which he may make notes, but he may not photocopy any of the documents it contains. In essence his defense amounts to a written statement prepared by him for inclusion with the submission to be made by the Revolutionary Court to the Supreme Court in Teheran. The Supreme Court will then study the file and, if it is satisfied that the proper procedures were followed, will refer the case to one of its branches. The judge or judges of this branch, without meeting with lawyers or anyone else, will then review the file and issue their judgment, either confirming or annulling the verdict. ^{286.5}

The fact remains that the Bahá'ís have not had an advocate of their own to argue their case in open court and that, even if they were to find a lawyer to handle their appeal, no adequate defense is possible. ^{286.6}

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

287

Arrest of Faculty Members of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education and Raids on Bahá'í Homes

6 OCTOBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to provide you with the following update on recent developments in Iran. ^{287.1}

A new, two-pronged assault was launched against the Iranian Bahá'í community during the last week. One was aimed at stultifying academic educational activities among the Bahá'ís; the other was a further attempt at destabilizing Bahá'í families. ^{287.2}

More than 36 faculty members of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) were reported to have been arrested between 29 September and ^{287.3}

3 October in cities across the country. It is understood that most of these have now been released, but that five in Tabriz and two in Tehran remain in custody. The arrests were carried out by officers of the Iranian Government's intelligence agency, the Ministry of Information, and also involved the seizure of textbooks, scientific papers and documentary records, some 70 computers, and items of furniture useful to students, including tables and benches. Those arrested were asked to sign a document declaring that BIHE had ceased to exist as of 29 September and undertaking that they would no longer cooperate with it. The detainees refused to sign any such declaration.

287.4 Raids on more than 500 Bahá'í homes added to the harassment suffered by Bahá'ís throughout Iran at the hands of intelligence officers. When queried about the seizure of personal household effects like television sets and pieces of furniture, these officers claimed that they had been authorized by the Attorney-General to take anything they wished.

287.5 The wave of arrests and harassment bears the marks of a centrally orchestrated campaign intended to lend impetus to the declared policy of the Iranian Government to nullify the Bahá'í community and force its members to convert to Islam. This policy became widely known in 1993 when it was accidentally revealed that the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Council had earlier adopted a position on "the Bahá'í question" in a secret document dated 25 February 1991 and signed by Ayatollah Khamenei. The document contained such declarations as the following:

287.5a The Government's dealings with them must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.

287.5b They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.

287.5c A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.

287.5d Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís.

287.5e Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sector, etc.

It is evident that the Iranian Government has worked at various means to achieve these ends; among them are the banning of the administrative institutions of the Faith, the disruption of the moral education classes for Bahá'í children and young people, the economic strangulation of the Bahá'ís through such means as the dismissal of Bahá'í employees, the denial of pensions and the confiscation of properties, and the prohibition of Bahá'í youth from entering institutions of higher learning in Iran. The recent attacks by Iranian authorities can be viewed as effecting only a part of this policy.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

288

Appeal Submitted to Supreme Court for Bahá'ís Imprisoned in Iran

1 DECEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

The Universal House of Justice has received copies of two important documents prepared by the lawyer who courageously agreed to conduct an appeal against the conviction of the three Bahá'ís imprisoned in Mashhad, despite various threats and intense pressure to dissuade him. The lawyer, Mr. Mahmud Kiani Bahjestani, a Muslim, submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court on behalf of Mr. Sirius Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid-Nasirizadeh, the first two of whom have been sentenced to death, and the third to ten years' imprisonment. Mr. Bahjestani was not able to interview his clients, nor was he permitted to have copies of the material in the defendants' files held by the court. He was, however, allowed to view those files and to make such notes as he wished. He did not appear before the Supreme Court but submitted his appeal in writing. 288.1

The first of the documents enclosed is a provisional translation of the notes taken by Mr. Bahjestani from his clients' files held by the judiciary in Mashhad. The second is a provisional translation of the appeal submission itself. 288.2

As you are aware, Bahá'í prisoners have rarely been allowed a lawyer during their so-called trials. Reference to page 3 of the enclosed extracts from the defendants' files (pages 38–40) and to section 4 on page 3 of the appeal 288.3

submission makes it clear that, before the initial trial, Branch 8 of the Mashhad court summarily imposed a lawyer of its own choosing, Mr. Ehtesham Shahabi, on the accused, failing to observe the legal requirement to allow them ten days to arrange for their own lawyer. The last sentence of the extract from pages 118–120 of the accused’s files shows that when Branch 3 of the Mashhad court came to retry the case, it having been referred back by the Supreme Court, the defendants were once more deprived of their right to select their own advocate, as Mr. Shahabi had again been appointed to represent them. In light of the foregoing, the international uproar at the evident injustices in their case may well have been a significant factor in the prisoners’ having for the first time been allowed to engage a lawyer, to make their appeal.

288.4 The two enclosed documents confirm beyond any shadow of a doubt the total baselessness of the claim by the Iranian Government that Mr. Ruhollah Rohani was executed for crimes threatening the security of Iran, and that the three prisoners arrested in Mashhad with him at about the same time, who have now appealed against their sentences, are guilty of any such crimes. In the absence of any merit in the Government’s claims, its attribution of crimes against the state to these prisoners appears to be merely another attempt to silence the protests of civilized countries and to justify its inhuman treatment of its Bahá’í citizens.

288.5 The first item in the lawyer’s extracts from his clients’ files is a copy of the text of a document that the authorities asked the prisoners to sign, committing themselves to desist from participation in Bahá’í activities. Had the prisoners complied with the authorities’ wishes by making this commitment, they would surely have been freed. You will note that there is nothing in this commitment regarding activities by the accused against the security of the country.

288.6 The spuriousness of the charge that the three defendants acted against national security becomes even clearer when one studies the text of the lawyer’s appeal submission to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, however, jurisdiction over the Bahá’í community has been given to the Ministry of Information, which deals with security and intelligence matters and comes under the direction of the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ayatollah Khamenei). Further, the appeal of the three accused is dealt with by the judiciary, which also falls under a fundamentalist ally of Mr. Khamenei, and this department has normally paid no attention to the appeals of Bahá’ís in the past. Consequently, it is not known whether the submission

of the lawyer in the present case will be treated any differently. It is hoped that intensive pressure brought to bear on the Iranian Government from outside the country and the resolutions passed by such bodies as the European Union and the United Nations will make a difference. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

289

Update on the Situation of the Bahá'ís Imprisoned in Iran

14 DECEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

This message is to bring you up to date on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. All those known to have been arrested in connection with the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) have been released, with the exception of the following friends in Isfahan, who were arrested in early October and are understood to be still detained: ^{289.1}

Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah

Mr. Farzad Khajeh

Dr. Sina Hakiman

Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian

The authorities called upon many of those arrested in relation to the BIHE to sign a statement committing themselves to cease serving in this institution and not to associate with it in the future. All refused to sign, since the operation of the Institute contravenes no law of the country. One of the effects of these widespread raids and arrests in Iran was to bring about a rededication among many of the friends there to their commitment to provide educational opportunities for the young Bahá'ís who have been so callously denied access to the higher education facilities in the country of their birth. ^{289.2}

The BIHE has resumed its activities for the new academic year, although its functioning is still hampered by the loss of equipment, especially computers, which it suffered in the raids, equipment that has not been returned. The announcement by the Friends in Iran inviting the Bahá'í students to resume their studies was made throughout the country at a recent Nineteen Day Feast. There has been no reaction from the Government as yet. ^{289.3}

289.4 In September 1996 we were informed that the final year of high school had been designated a pre-university year, and that Bahá'í students had been barred from attending it. This restriction brought with it a number of disadvantages to those affected, such as limiting their access to many employment opportunities and making it difficult for them to obtain a driving license. We are pleased to be able to report that this discrimination against Bahá'í youth appears to have come to an end very recently, and they are now able to register for the pre-university year in the high schools. It remains to be seen whether they will be awarded the certificate for successful completion of the year. The Friends in Iran feel that international pressure on the Government of Iran is likely to have been instrumental in bringing this about. . . .

289.5 At the same time . . . the harassment and intimidation of the Bahá'ís in that country has in no way abated, and flurries of arrests continue to occur. Often those arrested are released after a short time. Typical are the cases of three friends—Mr. Derakhshan Fanaiyan, Mrs. Minu Zamani (Fanaiyan) and Mr. Hossain Mazlumi-Nosratabad—who were arrested in the town of Damavand on 17 October; information has just been received that they have been released. . . . they are very much part of the pattern of harassment. For example, five friends engaged in teaching Bahá'í children's classes were recently arrested in the tribal area of Boyer Ahmadi-ye in western central Iran; further arrests are reported to have taken place during the last two weeks of November in Tankabon and Sari, in the region north of Tehran, and four friends are believed to have been detained . . .

289.6 You will have received our email of 1 December enclosing the statement of the lawyer who appealed on behalf of the convicted friends in Mashhad, Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid-Nasirizadeh. Nothing further is known of their situation as yet. It should also be remembered that four other Bahá'ís remain condemned to death in Iran, two—Mr. Musa Talebi and Mr. Zabihullah Mahrami—for apostasy, and two—Mr. Kayvan Khalajabadi and Mr. Behnam Mithaqi—for Bahá'í activities. They were condemned some years ago, and their ultimate fate is still uncertain. . . .

289.7 The Universal House of Justice deeply appreciates your continuing efforts on behalf of these and all the Bahá'ís in Iran who steadfastly bear sufferings out of loyalty to the Blessed Beauty.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

290

Resignation from the Continental Board of Counselors

4 JANUARY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have accepted the resignation of Afemata Moli Chang from membership of the Continental Board of Counselors in Australasia. In doing so, we express our gratitude for the dedicated services he has rendered in this capacity, and look forward to his devoted endeavors for the advancement of the Cause in the years ahead. ^{290.1}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

291

Message to the European Bahá'í Youth Council

2 FEBRUARY 1999

To the European Bahá'í Youth Council

To the Meeting of European National Bahá'í Youth Committees called by the European Bahá'í Youth Council in Nove Zamky, Slovakia

Beloved Friends,

The Bahá'í communities of the European continent play a unique role in the Bahá'í world. In no other continent are there so many independent national Bahá'í communities in such a relatively small area speaking such a diversity of languages, living in countries which, after centuries of internecine strife, are being pulled by the force of providence into ever closer collaboration. These countries are linked, moreover, by the ties of history with every other part of the world. ^{291.1}

The struggles of the European nations towards harmony and justice, the periodic resurgence of violent opposition to the dual process of the emancipation and unification of peoples, are a concentrated sample of the labor of the whole world for the unification of humankind, which is the hallmark of this Dispensation. ^{291.2}

In this context one can better appreciate the importance of the devoted, enthusiastic and collaborative activity of the Bahá'í youth throughout Europe. It is the very diversity and complexity of Europe that required the es- ^{291.3}

establishment of the European Bahá'í Youth Council as an institution which, at one and the same time, facilitates collaboration among the European Bahá'í youth, assists them to have a united vision, and provides them with a voice in the councils of other youth movements on that continent.

291.4 National Youth Committees have great responsibilities for the activities of the young Bahá'ís in their respective countries. May your efforts assist them all to enrich the record of their already outstanding services to the Cause, to deepen their understanding of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and to uphold in every aspect of their lives the standards of behavior which He has set before them.

291.5 It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that your deliberations at this gathering will give a new impetus to the endeavors of the European Bahá'í youth for the achievement of the Four Year Plan as a basis for the great work which lies ahead of them thereafter.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

292

Release of a Document to Commemorate the End of the Twentieth Century

25 FEBRUARY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

292.1 The year 2000 will conclude the hundred years that 'Abdu'l-Bahá described as "the century of light." His perspective on the twentieth century offers Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities an opportunity to participate meaningfully in many of the activities and discussions expected to take place around the world over the coming two years.

292.2 To assist the friends in this respect, the Universal House of Justice has asked the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information to prepare the enclosed document, "Who is Writing the Future?" As you will see, it both examines the events of the twentieth century in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings, and relates these developments to the challenges facing humanity at century's end. Its purpose is to serve as a source of ideas, perspectives, images, and language that will stimulate a wide range of creative responses among Bahá'ís.

The sponsorship of millennial activities will, of course, be the concern ^{292.3} of non-Bahá'í groups, but the House of Justice believes that such activities can be seen by Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í communities as creating occasions whose effectiveness can be enhanced by Bahá'í contributions. Given the great diversity of our community's resources, National Spiritual Assemblies will want to ensure that ample latitude is given for a wide range of responses by individual believers and groups. Artists, writers, musicians and dramatists will no doubt find the enclosed document highly stimulating and will readily identify ways in which its themes can be introduced into activities organized by government agencies and various private bodies. It is likely that programs of scholarly associations will also present a range of opportunities for qualified believers to draw attention to Bahá'í perspectives on the current world situation. Your Assembly may wish to address special messages to groups in your own country, adapting elements of the document's theme to this purpose.

In order that such efforts enjoy broad support within the Bahá'í community, ^{292.4} it will be important for the friends to understand the message being communicated. Consequently, consideration should be given to ways of incorporating the material in the enclosed document into Bahá'í summer school programs and local study activities.

As you will note, "Who is Writing the Future?" has been cast in the form ^{292.5} of a message addressed to non-Bahá'í readers. This has been done primarily in order to make the material most readily useful to Bahá'ís participating in the various events marking the beginning of the new millennium. Should your Assembly feel, however, that the document would also be useful as a booklet or brochure, there is no objection to your publishing it. In that case, although the design is left to your discretion, the text should be used in its present form, without editing, commentary, or supplementary material.

Whatever their various forms of belief, our fellow human beings are ^{292.6} looking to the immediate future with mingled feelings of tentative hope and deep anxiety. This circumstance offers Bahá'ís a unique opportunity to share with them the Teachings that give meaning to this critical moment in human history.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

293

Appointment of Continental Counselor for Australasia

11 MARCH 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{293.1} We are pleased to announce the appointment of Donald Blanks as a member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Australasia, to fill the vacancy which resulted from the announcement made in our letter of 4 January 1999.²⁹³⁻¹

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

294

Establishment of Chair for Bahá'í Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

29 MARCH 1999

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{294.1} We are happy to announce that documents were signed today establishing a Chair for Bahá'í Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. After visiting the Shrine of the Báb, the University's President and Rector, together with other senior officers and representatives of the Bahá'í World Center, took part in a brief private ceremony. The signature and exchange of documents concluded discussions initiated by the University nearly a year ago. In the introduction to its formal proposal for the establishment of the Chair, the University thus explained its motivation:

^{294.1a} Three years ago, Professor Moshe Sharon began to teach the History and Sacred Literature of the Bahá'í Faith, on a regular basis, at the Institute of Asian and African Studies in the Faculty of Humanities of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As a result of Professor Sharon's

293-1. See no. 290, p. 655.

pioneering work, the University has become convinced of the importance of the field and of the need to provide an institutional basis for the continuation and development of this work on both the teaching and research levels.

It is noteworthy that in 1925, when the University was being established, ^{294.2} the beloved Guardian wrote a letter of warm encouragement to its founders, since which time it has achieved world renown.

We offer thanksgiving at the Holy Threshold for this unanticipated ^{294.3} manifestation of Bahá'ú'lláh's ceaseless bounties.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

295

Guidance for Serving Indigenous People

6 APRIL 1999

To a Local Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 6 January 1999 ^{295.1} and has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice is deeply concerned about the condition and needs ^{295.2} of the indigenous people . . . Although there is no doubt that increased material resources would be helpful in resolving some of the problems which exist there, they will not suffice to bring about a fundamental and enduring solution. This can only come about through a realization that, at a basic level, the issues which you face are essentially spiritual, dealing with values, attitudes, and behavior. Hence, a spiritual solution is required.

The message of the Bahá'í Faith is that Bahá'ú'lláh has brought teachings ^{295.3} which are infused with a dynamic spiritual power with which the most formidable barriers can be overcome and the most sweeping transformation effected. You, dear friends, who have been privileged to accept these divine teachings in this day can best meet your own needs and those of the wider society . . . by giving first priority to your endeavors to put the Bahá'í teachings into practice. Through your obedience to Bahá'í law, your striving to spiritualize your lives, and your continuing effort to deepen your understanding of the Holy Writings, you can most appropriately respond to the

needs of the present time. It is most important that you strive to make your Local Spiritual Assembly strong and effective, through its holding regular meetings, its development of the skills of consultation, and through its attention to pressing needs such as the holding of the Nineteen Day Feast, the establishment of regular children's classes, and the provision of guidance to Bahá'í youth in their personal development and education.

295.4 As you persevere in such aims, you will find that your Bahá'í community will grow in unity and cohesion, and will attract the attention of those around you because of its shining qualities. On such a foundation you will be able to embark on a wide range of social and economic development projects which will improve the material life of the people, and solve the problems to which you have drawn attention in your letter. Your Spiritual Assembly should not hesitate to turn to your National Spiritual Assembly for guidance in carrying out your functions, and should make every possible effort to implement the directions it gives you. In addition, the Auxiliary Board members assigned to serve your area are a most valuable source of advice and counsel.

295.5 You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on your behalf as you strive to carry out your duties.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

296

Release of Compilation on Internal Opposition to the Bahá'í Faith

7 APRIL 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith

296.1 In May of 1998, *Bahá'í Canada* reproduced a collection of letters which the Universal House of Justice had written to various individuals on the subject of the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. Copies of this compilation were subsequently mailed by the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly to its sister Assemblies. The reprint has now been made generally available in booklet form by the United States Bahá'í Publishing Trust. The House of

Justice has asked us to forward you a copy of the latter publication with the following comments.

As a number of the friends are aware, a campaign of internal opposition ^{296.2} to the Teachings is currently being carried on through the use of the Internet, a communications system that now reaches virtually every part of the world. Differing from attacks familiar in the past, it seeks to recast the entire Faith into a sociopolitical ideology alien to Bahá'ú'lláh's intent. In the place of the institutional authority established by His Covenant, it promotes a kind of interpretive authority which those behind it attribute to the views of persons technically trained in Middle East studies.

Early in 1996, the deliberate nature of the plan was revealed in an accidental posting to an Internet list which Bahá'í subscribers had believed ^{296.3} was dedicated to scholarly exploration of the Cause. Some of the people responsible resigned from the Faith when Counselors pointed out to them the direction their activities were taking. A small number of others continue to promote the campaign within the Bahá'í community.

In the past, in situations of a somewhat similar nature, the patience and ^{296.4} compassion shown by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian helped various believers who had been misled by ill-intentioned persons to eventually free themselves from such entanglements. In this same spirit of forbearance the Universal House of Justice has intervened in the current situation only to the extent that has been unavoidable, trusting to the good sense and the goodwill of the believers involved to awaken to the spiritual dangers to which they are exposing themselves. Nevertheless, certain Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies are monitoring the problem closely, and the friends can be confident that whatever further steps are needed to protect the integrity of the Cause will be taken.

As passages in the enclosed reprint make clear, this campaign of internal ^{296.5} opposition—while purporting to accept the legitimacy of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as twin successors of Bahá'ú'lláh and the Center of His Covenant—attempts to cast doubt on the nature and scope of the authority conferred on them in the Writings. When other Bahá'ís have pointed out that such arguments contradict explicit statements of the Master, persons behind the scheme have responded by calling into question the soundness of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own judgment and perspective. Gradually, these arguments have exposed the view of those involved that Bahá'ú'lláh Himself was not the voice of God to our age but merely a particularly enlightened moral philosopher, one whose primary concern was to reform existing society.

296.6 By itself, such opposition would likely stand little chance of influencing reasonably informed Bahá'ís. As one of the letters in the enclosed reprint (20 July 1997) points out, the scheme relies for effect, therefore, on exploiting the confusion created in modern thought by the reigning doctrines of materialism. Although the reality of God's continuous relationship with His creation and His intervention in human life and history are the very essence of the teachings of the Founders of the revealed religions, dogmatic materialism today insists that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to ignore the truths that make religion what it is.

296.7 In general, the strategy being pursued has been to avoid direct attacks on the Faith's Central Figures. The effort, rather, has been to sow the seeds of doubt among believers about the Faith's teachings and institutions by appealing to unexamined prejudices that Bahá'ís may have unconsciously absorbed from non-Bahá'í society. In defiance of the clear interpretation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's limiting of membership on the Universal House of Justice to men is misrepresented as merely a "temporary measure" subject to eventual revision if sufficient pressure is brought to bear. Similarly, Shoghi Effendi's explanation of Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth that will unite spiritual and civil authority is dismissed in favor of the assertion that the modern political concept of "separation of church and state" is somehow one that Bahá'u'lláh intended as a basic principle of the World Order He has founded. Particularly subtle is an attempt to suggest that the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* should evolve into a seat of quasi-doctrinal authority, parallel to and essentially independent of the Local House of Justice, which would permit various interests to insinuate themselves into the direction of the life processes of the Cause.

296.8 Typically, when misrepresentations of the kind described are challenged, the reaction of those behind the campaign has been to claim that their civil rights are being threatened, an assertion that is of course meaningless in the light of the purely voluntary nature of Bahá'í membership. Much emphasis is placed by them also on academic freedom, their view of which proves, on examination, to be merely freedom on their part to pervert scholarly discourse to the promotion of their own ideological agenda, while seeking to exclude from discussion features of the Bahá'í Faith that are central to the Writings of its Founders.

The effect of continued exposure to such insincerity about matters vital to humanity's well-being is spiritually corrosive. When we encounter minds that are closed and hearts that are darkened by evident malice, Bahá'u'lláh urges that we leave such persons to God and turn our attention to the opportunities which multiply daily for the promotion of the truths which He teaches. In words written at the direction of the Guardian, regarding a situation similar to, though much less serious than, the present one, “. . . the friends should be advised to just leave these people alone, for their influence can be nothing but negative and destructive. . . .”²⁹⁶⁻¹ 296.9

The enclosed material is being sent to your Assembly less out of concern over the immediate situation, which is being systematically addressed, than because of longer-term considerations to which it lends perspective. What we are currently seeing, in a relatively primitive form, is the emergence of a new kind of internal opposition to Bahá'u'lláh's Mission. While it will no doubt assume other features as time passes, it is a kind of opposition that takes aim directly at Bahá'u'lláh's assertion of the spiritual nature of reality and of humanity's dependence on the interventions of Divine Revelation. 296.10

Developments of the kind described will come as no surprise to friends who are familiar with the Guardian's description of the successive waves of “crisis” and “victory” that have marked the history of the Faith ever since its inception. It is precisely this cyclical process, Shoghi Effendi says, that has propelled the steady unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's intent, testing our commitment to His Teachings, purifying His community, and releasing a greater measure of the capacities latent in His Revelation. That resistance to Bahá'u'lláh should now be emerging in yet a new guise is itself a tribute to the gathering strength of the Cause, offering the friends everywhere new opportunities for the deepening of their faith and the energizing of their work. 296.11

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

296-1. MC, p. 66.

297

Verdict for Arrest and Imprisonment of Four Bahá'ís in Iran

15 APRIL 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

^{297.1} You have already been informed, through our email letter of 24 March 1999, of the disturbing news of the prison sentences received by four Bahá'ís in Iṣfahán, Dr. Sina Hakiman, Mr. Farzad Khajeh Sharifabadi, Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian Najafabadi and Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah. The condemned men did not receive a written copy of the court verdict giving details of their alleged crimes and their sentences, this information being conveyed to them orally. A transcript of the text of the verdict, number 2/791/77, has now been received, and a provisional translation of it is enclosed for your reference.

^{297.2} The four Bahá'ís were convicted in connection with their participation in the activities of the Institute for Higher Bahá'í Studies, which is a similar kind of organization to BIHE, although the latter focuses mainly on academic subjects, whereas the Institute for Higher Bahá'í Studies is essentially concerned with the study of matters related directly to the Faith. You will recall that the many teachers, administrators and office workers of BIHE, who were arrested all over Iran in the raids on more than 530 Bahá'í homes in the fall of 1998, were all released some time ago, with the exception of the four in Iṣfahán who have now been sentenced.

^{297.3} It is significant to note that the verdict is based on an article of the criminal law of Iran pertaining to the security of the country, although it has no relevance to the charges mentioned in the text of the court report. The membership of the four men in the Institute for Higher Bahá'í Studies is cited as their major crime. The Institute is referred to as “secret,” and its crime was to attract youth to undertake study of their own Faith, an activity branded by the text of the verdict as “teaching against Islám and the regime of the Islamic Republic.” Bahá'í studies are, of course, not only not against Islám, but they do not relate in any way whatsoever to the politics of the Islamic Republic. The Bahá'í community in Iran has the right to study the tenets of its Faith, which is universal and all-embracing, acknowledging the validity of Islám and of all the revealed religions of the past.

Dr. Hakiman was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, and the only ^{297.4} offenses that the court verdict specifies are that he was "one of the active members of the [Bahá'í] sect" and was "responsible for the formation of classes for Bahá'í Studies." Mr. Sharifabadi was sentenced to seven years, and the verdict states that he was "another active member of the misled Bahá'í sect, Secretary of the Institute for [Higher] Bahá'í Studies, affiliated with the House of Justice of the Bahá'ís and Israel" and that he was "also in charge of the educational books of the Bahá'ís." The verdict states that Mr. Najafabadi (also seven years), was a "follower of the Bahá'í ideology, member of the illegal Institute for [Higher Bahá'í] Studies" and "administrator, supporter and distributor of books amongst the members and students affiliated to the misled [Bahá'í] sect." The verdict finds Mr. Mirzapanah, who was given a three-year sentence, to have been "the intermediary between Tīhrán and Iṣfahán and the Institute for [Higher] Bahá'í Studies, and [engaged in] activity against the regime of the Islamic Republic."

Not only are the astonishing sentences by the court wholly unjustified ^{297.5} and beyond all reason, but its verdict also has nothing to do with the article of the penal code which it cites in justification of its decisions. The text of this article is:

Article 498—Anyone, of whatever belief, who forms or organizes an ^{297.5a} association, group or branch of a group with two or more people, under any name or title, in or outside the country, whose aim is the disruption of the security of the country, shall be sentenced to between two and ten years' imprisonment, provided that he does not fall into the category of "muḥárib" [one who wages war against God].

It is clear that this article has no relationship to individuals engaged in teaching the tenets of their peace-loving Faith to its young followers. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

298

Postponement of Formation of National Spiritual Assembly of Macedonia

15 APRIL 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

298.1 In the Riḍván message 156 B.E. reference is made to the convocation of the first Convention to form a National Spiritual Assembly in Macedonia. We have been asked to inform you that owing to conditions in that country at the present time, the Universal House of Justice has decided to postpone the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Macedonia.

298.2 Kindly ensure that this information is released at the same time as the Riḍván message and that caution is exercised so that it is not generally circulated in advance.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

299

Riḍván Message 1999

RIḌVÁN 156

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

299.1 Our hearts are aglow with hope as we survey what has been accomplished in the year preceding the fateful, final stretch toward the consummation of the Four Year Plan. From the year's momentous beginning with the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention, the Bahá'í world has sustained a rising pace of activity that has significantly advanced the process of entry by troops. Our community has grown appreciably, its human resources have been richly enhanced. From projects of expansion to endeavors at consolidation, from social and economic development to external affairs, from services of the youth to expressions in the arts, from the World Center of the Faith to remote villages and towns—in fact, from whatever angle the community is viewed—progress has been made. The prospects for the Plan are impelling.

The momentum generated at the International Convention pervaded the Counselors' Conference that immediately followed it, further galvanizing the indefatigable participants; and it charged the proceedings of the National Conventions held in May, including those of Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia which met for the first time to form their National Spiritual Assemblies. That same energy infused the International Teaching Center, which has been displaying a remarkable potency in the short time since its sixth term began on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. Concentrating on refining and consolidating their organization, the Counselor members have refrained from their usual travels during this first year, but they can be expected after this to resume their visits to various parts of the world, so as to reinforce their vitalizing influence on the successful conclusion of the Four Year Plan. ^{299.2}

Further to these happenings in the Holy Land, the construction projects on Mount Carmel, beheld with such thrilling astonishment by the delegates to the International Convention, press onward towards their scheduled completion at the end of the century. With the opening since last Riḍván of all remaining areas of construction, the speed of work has reached a new peak. The Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the Archives Building are being readied for occupancy within a few weeks; the exterior of the International Teaching Center building is fully clad in marble, while finishing work at all levels of its interior is proceeding. The lowering of Hatzionut Avenue, to accommodate the bridge which now connects the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb on both sides of the road, has been completed and normal traffic restored. The unfolding magnificence of the Terraces has so captured public attention that the nineteenth terrace at the top of the mountain has already been opened to visitors on a daily schedule, evoking the enthusiastic response of a grateful populace. As part of a campaign to attract international attention to the city, the Municipality of Haifa has published a pictorial brochure on the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces, available in five major languages besides Hebrew. ^{299.3}

We feel compelled to mention at least two other developments at the World Center of a wholly different order: First, the decision to raise the number of pilgrims in each group to 150 from 100—this to take effect when the revamping, now in progress, of the newly acquired building, situated across the way from the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, has been completed and use can be made of its provision of a pilgrim hall and other facilities for the administration of an expanded pilgrimage program. ^{299.4}

Second is the notable headway being made, despite the inevitable slowness of the process, in the plan to translate texts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh with a view to publishing a new English volume of His works. Effort is being devoted to providing full versions of such major Tablets as the Súriy-i-Mulúk and the Súriy-i-Haykal, as well as complete texts of Tablets addressed to individual kings and rulers. Also scheduled for inclusion are the Súriy-i-Ra'ís, the Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís and the Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád.

299.5 The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh marches on resistlessly, quickened by the increasing application of an approach to the development and use of human resources that is systematic. The further creation of national and regional training institutes, now numbering 344, has pressed this development forward, with the result that, apart from North America and Iran where numerous courses have been given, some 70,000 individuals have already completed at least one institute course. All of this is contributing to a growing body of confirmed, active supporters of the Cause. The untold potential of this progression is illustrated in such reports as the one received from Chad, where in an area served by an institute more than 1,000 people embraced the Faith through the individual efforts of those who had received training. Understanding of the necessity for systematization in the development of human resources is everywhere taking hold.

299.6 Collateral with the demonstrated efficacy of training institutes is the pragmatic emergence of Regional Bahá'í Councils in selected countries where conditions have made the establishment of these institutions necessary and viable. Where there is close interaction between a Council and a training institute, the stage is set for a galvanic coherence of the processes effecting expansion and consolidation in a region, and for the practical matching of the training services of institutes to the developmental needs of local communities. Moreover, the operational guidelines whereby the Continental Counselors and the Regional Councils have direct access to each other give rise to a further institutional relationship which, along with that connecting the Councils to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, effectuates a dynamic integration of functions at the regional level.

299.7 The ever-expanding work in social and economic development is also benefiting from the operation of those training institutes that give attention to such subjects as literacy, primary health care and the advancement of women. The more widespread efforts of the Office of Social and Economic Development to promote a global process of learning about relevant Bahá'í principles are enhanced by the work of these institutes, as well as by the rise

of Bahá'í-inspired organizations scattered throughout the planet. Clearly, then, the institutional capacity to administer development programs is gaining in strength. This is apparent in projects sponsored by Bahá'í institutions or initiated by individuals through the inspiration of the Faith. An outstanding example of the latter is Unity College, which was created by a family in Ethiopia as the first, and since late 1998, the only private college in the country, with a student body that swelled to 5,000 during this past year. Another example, on a smaller scale but of significance nonetheless, is the initiative taken by a family in Buffalo, New York: here, in their home, they have been assisting tens of children and youth from the inner city to develop, through Bahá'í spiritual and moral teachings, patterns of behavior that will enable them to overcome self-destructive attitudes bred by poverty and racism.

In the area of external affairs, the most energetic actions have been prompted by two tragic happenings in Iran. The sudden execution in Mashhad last July of Mr. Rúḥu'lláh Rawḥání, the first such official action in six years, registered a shock that provoked a worldwide and unprecedented outcry by governments and United Nations agencies. In late September the government's intelligence agency launched an organized attack on the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, involving the arrest of 36 members of the faculty and raids on more than 500 homes across the country. The latter incident inspired a global campaign of protest, still in progress, in which academic institutions and associations, educators, and student groups have been participating, and in which the press has taken a special interest, as reflected in the appearance of substantial articles in *Le Monde*, *The New York Times* and other major newspapers. The successful passage in the United Nations General Assembly last December of yet another resolution on Iran, in which the Bahá'ís are distinctly mentioned, must surely have been influenced by these two conspicuous manifestations of an unrelenting religious persecution. ^{299.8}

But intensive as has been the demand upon the friends in all parts of the world to defend our beleaguered brethren, much attention was devoted as well to a wide range of external affairs endeavors. The four-month-long mission undertaken by an emissary of the House of Justice, Mr. Giovanni Ballerio, to islands of the Pacific Ocean where he met with 22 heads of state, 5 heads of government and more than 40 other high-ranking officials; the efforts pursued by a number of National Assemblies, at the urging of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, to promote ^{299.9}

human rights education; the participation, by invitation, of representatives of South Africa's Bahá'í community in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at which they were able to recount their record of unflinching support of racial unity throughout the years of apartheid; the recent success of communities in Australia, Brazil, Finland and Portugal in obtaining the decision of educational authorities to include courses on the Bahá'í Faith in the curricula of primary and secondary schools—these, not to mention the public information projects that generated publicity through all forms of the media, are examples of the broadly based enterprises in external affairs that engaged the energies of the community.

299.10 A corollary spate of activities involved the use of the arts, of which the musical and other artistic performances associated with the celebration in Paris of the centenary of the establishment of the Faith in Europe were an outstanding instance. The Voices of Bahá Choir, composed of 68 members drawn from Europe and the Americas, delighted audiences in eight European cities and introduced the Faith to many. "Light and Fire," the completed part of an opera/ballet being written by Bahá'í composer Lasse Thoresen of Norway, was successfully performed last September at the prestigious music festival in Poland known as the Warsaw Autumn, which was opened by the Queen of Sweden. The work is based on recent heroic acts of the martyrs in Iran, a fact that exposed the audience to knowledge of the Faith. Europe's apparent lead in these particular endeavors was also marked by the occasion of the Austrian Chamber Music Festival when the Austrian Cross for Sciences and Arts, the highest award of its kind for Austria, was presented by the President of the Republic to Mr. Bijan Khadem-Missagh, a Bahá'í violinist and conductor. A program at that same Festival featured the recitation of extracts from Bahá'í and other sacred scriptures. But a word, too, must be said in recognition of the prominent part being played by youth all over the world in their employment of the arts in the teaching work; renditions by their dance workshops, in particular, have acquired renown within and outside the Bahá'í community.

299.11 We therefore enter this Riḍván season, as a community in a dynamic state of transformation, enjoying a coherence of vision and activity consonant with the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. And we begin the final year of the Plan with a boost in administrative strength, as three countries in Europe—Latvia, Lithuania and Macedonia—convoke their first Conventions to form National Spiritual Assemblies and thus raise the number of pillars of the Universal House of Justice to 182. But beyond this

festive moment is a chronology of expectations that lists, first and foremost, the conclusion of the Four Year Plan at Riḍván 2000. This will be followed by the commencement on the Day of the Covenant of that very year of a new term of office for the Continental Boards of Counselors, whose members will soon thereafter be called to the Bahá'í World Center for a conference at which, among other matters, the features of the next global teaching and consolidation plan will be discussed. The Counselors' Conference will mark the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat, an occasion for which Auxiliary Board members throughout the world will be invited to join the Counselors in the Holy Land. The Mount Carmel projects will have been completed by this time and the preparations will have been well advanced for dedicatory events, scheduled to take place on 22 and 23 May 2001, to which a number of representatives from each national Bahá'í community will be invited. The details concerning these events are to be announced in due course.

This projection of portentous happenings cuts across the divide in time ^{299.12} between the twentieth century and the new millennium, according to the reckoning of the common era. It is a projection that underscores the contrast between the confident vision that propels the constructive endeavors of an illumined community and the tangled fears seizing the millions upon millions who are as yet unaware of the Day in which they are living. Bereft of authentic guidance, they dwell on the horrors of the century, despairing over what these could imply for the future, hardly appreciating that this very century contains a light that will be shed on centuries to come. Ill-equipped to interpret the social commotion at play throughout the planet, they listen to the pundits of error and sink deeper into a slough of despond. Troubled by forecasts of doom, they do battle with the phantoms of a wrongly informed imagination. Knowing nothing of the transformative vision vouchsafed by the Lord of the Age, they stumble ahead, blind to the peerlessness of the new Day of God.

The pitiful conditions implied by such a state of heart and mind cannot ^{299.13} but prompt us all to action, unabating action, to fulfill the intentions of a Plan whose major aim is to accelerate that process which will make it possible for growing numbers of the world's people to find the Object of their quest and thus to build a united, peaceful and prosperous life.

Dear Friends: The days pass swiftly as the twinkle of a star. Make your ^{299.14} mark now, at this crucial turning point of a juncture, the like of which shall never return. Make that mark in deeds that will ensure for you celes-

tial blessings—guarantee for you, for the entire race, a future beyond any earthly reckoning.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

300

Message to the First National Convention of the Bahá'ís of Latvia

RIDVÁN 156

To the Bahá'ís of Latvia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{300.1} It is with profound happiness that we greet the dear friends who are gathered for the first National Convention of the Bahá'ís of Latvia. This significant achievement is the fruit of the united efforts of all the friends in the Baltic States, together with the assistance of the many dedicated souls who have visited your country, beginning with Miss Martha Root, who first brought the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to Latvia during her visit to Riga in April 1927. Today, your community has acquired the strength to elect its own National Spiritual Assembly, and stands ready to carry forward the noble work of the Cause.

^{300.2} Dear friends, the task before you is indeed challenging. Yours is the duty to show forth, by your words and by your deeds, the power of the Word of God to transform human character and the ordering of society. You must strive, by the force of your example of harmony and of love towards all people, to play your part in obliterating the racial, religious and political animosities which have for so long plagued humankind. Your countrymen are eagerly receptive to the gift which you can offer them, and opportunities for advancing the Cause have never been so plentiful. Your National Assembly, as a divinely ordained institution of the Administrative Order, is the channel for the outpouring of heavenly guidance and assistance, and your faithful and loving allegiance to it will be the surest means for the attainment of your highest aspirations.

^{300.3} Be assured that we shall offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that the believers in your dear country will put forth a great effort in their love for Bahá'u'lláh. May He bless and guide your every step.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

301

Message to the First National Convention of the Bahá'ís of Lithuania

RIPVÁN 156

To the Bahá'ís of Lithuania

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is with exceeding gladness that we greet the dear friends of Lithuania on the historic occasion of their first National Bahá'í Convention. The emergence of the independent National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Lithuania is a cause of rejoicing for the whole Bahá'í world. This precious victory for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is the fruit of the self-sacrificing endeavors of the devoted believers, whether native Lithuanians, pioneers or traveling teachers, who have raised up a dynamic national Bahá'í community where, just a decade ago, there were only two believers in the entire country. Looking even further back, we can see the foundations of this achievement in the travels of Miss Martha Root, who planted the seeds of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings in her visit to Kaunas in April 1927. 301.1

A new chapter in the history of the Faith in your country is opening. You can render no greater service to your people than sharing the life-giving Message of Bahá'u'lláh with your fellow citizens. It is your high privilege to work toward the fulfillment of such a noble goal with ever greater vigor, confidence and courage. The continued expansion of teaching activities, the steady multiplication and consolidation of your Local Spiritual Assemblies, the encouragement of youth, the holding of regular classes for children, and the ever more effective use of your training institute—these stand out among your major tasks as you face a challenging future. 301.2

For outward developments to properly endure and flourish, they must be matched by inner spiritual growth. The process of drawing ever closer to Bahá'u'lláh in prayer and meditation, of deepening your grasp and appreciation of the fundamental verities of our Faith, of transforming your personal lives and conduct and fostering strong bonds of unity and love among the believers will enable you to reach unimagined heights and lay the foundation for a rich and active community life which, by its example, will draw the souls of others to its blissful shelter. 301.3

Rest assured that we shall pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá'u'lláh may bless and strengthen you with His divine confirmations 301.4

and enable you to foster the sound growth and development of His Faith in your land.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

302

Primary Source Material at the Bahá'í World Center

4 MAY 1999

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

^{302.1} The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 30 December 1998 requesting clarification of the policies governing access to sources at the Bahá'í World Center and regarding publication of primary source material available to people through other avenues. It welcomes the opportunity to provide further information on these issues and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

^{302.2} Your questions have to be considered in the context of the range of the work and responsibilities of the Universal House of Justice. One of the most important functions of the Head of the Cause is to guide the faithful to the tasks which need to be performed at each stage in its progress. It must allocate the resources of the Faith and point out those areas on which attention should be focused. Naturally, each individual tends to see the importance of his or her special interests or to focus on needs which are immediately apparent. All these have their own validity, but it is the Universal House of Justice which sees the whole picture and can guide the process. The friends must have faith in this, otherwise their efforts will be dissipated and even mutually conflicting.

^{302.3} The question of providing access to primary source materials is but one of the matters which must occupy the attention and consume the resources of the Cause. The written material of this Dispensation is incomparably rich and varied, and we now stand only a century and a half from the day on which the Báb announced His Mission to Mullá Ḥusayn in Shíráz.

^{302.4} Access to source documents relating to the Bahá'í Faith which are held in libraries in different parts of the world, or are in the hands of individuals, is open to anyone who wishes to consult them, dependent only on the permission of the institution or individual in whose possession the documents are

held. A major service which a number of Bahá'í scholars have rendered to the Faith is in tracing such deposits and, where possible, obtaining archival quality photocopies for the World Center Archives and Library.

As for source documents at the World Center itself: these are held by the Universal House of Justice in trust for the entire Bahá'í world and ultimately for the whole of humankind, of both present and future generations. There is tremendous work to be accomplished in sorting, identifying and cataloging such documents so that they can be effectively studied without either damaging them or losing vital information by disturbing their interrelationships. As far as the urgent needs of the Faith are concerned, the primary work in this respect must be devoted to the Sacred Texts rather than to documents of historical interest, although the latter are by no means ignored. It would be irresponsible for the House of Justice, without itself first being fully informed of what is in the Archives, to consider opening them to individual scholars for the pursuit of purely personal interests. 302.5

Far from allowing anyone to tamper with the historical records, the Universal House of Justice has the obligation to preserve the integrity, not only of the Sacred Texts, but of all the historical documents in its possession. It has, moreover, a responsibility for arranging their publication for the scholarly world in a coherent manner that will not give a misleading impression of events as a result of the mere choice of the items and the order in which they are made public. Undoubtedly, in due course, it will be possible to publish editions of historical documents in facsimile accompanied, in the case of each document, by a printed transcription, and supplemented by necessary commentaries and notes. It is with such thoughts in mind that the House of Justice feels that a certain discipline is required of those individual believers who decide, for their own purposes, to publish or translate documents which they have at hand. 302.6

This entire process is made the more delicate by past experience with those who, pursuing unacknowledged agendas of their own, have wished to publish certain documents for ulterior motives, or with others who have lacked the good sense and breadth of vision to act responsibly. 302.7

You refer to the principle of the unfettered search after truth. This is certainly upheld, but it cannot imply that the institutions of the Faith have a duty to make available to each inquirer every piece of information he or she requests. We are faced here, not with wisdom prevailing over the search for truth, but with a process of organic growth, both in the world and, commensurate with it, at the World Center of the Faith. 302.8

302.9 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to assure you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines for the reinforcement of your devoted endeavors to advance the interests of the Cause of Bahá'í u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

303

Increased Need for Contributions to the Bahá'í International Fund

25 MAY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

303.1 With the Four Year Plan proceeding rapidly toward its conclusion, the Universal House of Justice has decided that it is necessary to provide you with information about the international funds of the Faith. We have been asked to convey the following.

303.2 As a result of the sacrificial contributions from believers everywhere for over a decade, the vast construction project on Mount Carmel is moving toward conclusion with unprecedented speed. The House of Justice is confident that Bahá'ís throughout the world will continue to meet the need expressed in its 20 June 1995 letter to you for the contribution of ten million dollars each year until the end of the century.³⁰³⁻¹

303.3 A new challenge has emerged as a result of the progress of the Faith both at the World Center and throughout the planet. It is becoming evident that the level of expenditure required from the Bahá'í International Fund is rising sharply, due to a combination of the following factors. The Edifices and Terraces on Mount Carmel must be maintained at a standard appropriate to their character and the dignity of the Faith; measures must also be instituted to handle, in an appropriate manner, the greatly increased number of people expected to visit the Terraces and to provide protection from damage. The emergence of the World Administrative Center on the Mountain of God in all its splendor is attracting increased attention to the Faith, and thus creating new opportunities for extension of the influence of

303-1. See no. 204, pp. 445–46.

the Cause. The achievements of the energetic and dedicated prosecutors of the Four Year Plan in all parts of the planet, establishing new institutions of the Faith and increasing its human resources, have raised the tempo of the administrative activity at the World Center, and call for the assignment of more resources to ensure that its work is carried out efficiently and with dispatch. The need for property acquisition in both Haifa and 'Akká areas to safeguard the serenity of the environs of the Holy Places, to which reference has been made in an earlier letter, remains pressing as the process of urban development in this area accelerates.

The House of Justice draws your attention to the necessity for increased support of the Bahá'í Fund at an international level with full confidence that the impressive record of sacrificial endeavor by the believers will be sustained in their response to the situation described here. The formulation of budgets at a national and local level should be carried out in the light of these conditions. Above all there should be no interruption to your sustained effort to assist the friends in your area to acquire a deeper understanding of the spiritual obligation binding upon all, irrespective of their circumstances, to contribute to the Funds of the Faith. In particular, those believers who have been blessed with material resources beyond those necessary for their essential needs should ponder deeply the responsibilities resting upon them at this time when the requirements of the Cause are so pressing. ^{303.4}

The prayers of the Universal House of Justice will be offered at the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of their endeavors to assist in the advancement of the Faith. ^{303.5}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

304
**Publication of English Translations
of the Bahá'í Writings**

30 JUNE 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

- 304.1 The Universal House of Justice has recently had opportunity to review the procedures related to the translation of Bahá'í Writings into English, whether involving whole works or extracts. We have been asked to share with you the following conclusions, which may relate to your publishing programs or to those of other Bahá'í publishers within your jurisdiction.
- 304.2 As in the past, certain Tablets or extracts translated into English for use or publication by the Bahá'í World Center or other publishers will continue to be reviewed and approved in the Holy Land and designated as "authorized translations."
- 304.3 However, because of the increasing need for translation of specific material, particularly in relation to growing scholarly interest in the Faith and its various Teachings, favorable consideration has been given to allowing wider use of provisional translations. Individual believers, of course, remain free to translate into English any of the Holy Writings for their own use. Such translations may also be published in circulars and journals without review other than by the editors of such publications. They may also be shared electronically. In all such cases they should be clearly identified as "provisional translations."
- 304.4 The House of Justice has now established a mechanism which will allow for inclusion in books and pamphlets of provisional translations which are of sufficiently good quality for wide distribution. Arrangements have been made for such translations to be checked at the World Center. When these items are to be included in works intended for publication by a Bahá'í publisher, the trust or publisher involved should forward them here for the necessary clearance. In the case of items to be included in works submitted to non-Bahá'í publishers, the authors or translators themselves should forward the items here for consideration prior to the involvement of any non-Bahá'í

publishers. Publications containing such translations, once these have been cleared, should indicate that they are provisional translations.

The translations submitted for checking at the World Center should include copies of the Arabic or Persian texts used by the translator(s). The items sent will be considered both from the point of view of the quality of the English rendering of the material and as to whether there are any major doubtful points with regard to the accuracy of the translation itself. Those which fall short on either of these counts will be returned to the sender with an explanation. For instance, the translations may need further refining or may contain mistakes of meaning, and, therefore, necessitate improvement before resubmission. 304.5

It remains the prerogative of the World Center to decide on the timeliness and wisdom of publishing English translations of specific Tablets. Some may be identified as not suitable for publication at the present time. 304.6

The House of Justice is hopeful that this new arrangement will lead to the availability of a greater amount of translated material and avoid the present delays in approving fully authorized translations. 304.7

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

305

Policies on Translation and Publication of Bahá'í Documents into English

4 JULY 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to the letter to you dated 30 June 1999³⁰⁵⁻¹ concerning English translations of Bahá'í Writings and their publication, we have been asked to convey to you the following related policies concerning the publication and translation of historical documents. For your ease of reference, Appendix 305.1

305-1. See no. 304, pp. 678–79.

II enclosed summarizes the policies concerning the translation of Bahá'í Sacred Writings into English, which were covered in our earlier letter.

305.2 The Universal House of Justice has noted two processes developing in recent years: an increase in the number of Bahá'ís who are individually translating portions of the Sacred Writings into English, and a growing number of Bahá'ís who wish to arrange for the publication of historical documents, accompanied by translations into English. Wishing to facilitate this process, while, at the same time, upholding the standard of approved translations and safeguarding the integrity of the Faith, the House of Justice has formulated two policy statements governing these matters (see Appendices II and III enclosed).

305.3 The net purpose of the policies is to speed up the review and publication of such items, and to permit a wider use of provisional translations.

305.4 To give you some background to these developments, we have been asked to send to you extracts from a letter which was written on 4 May 1999 to an individual believer who enquired about the provision of primary source material to students of the Faith (see Appendix I). As you will see, these passages cover such matters as the various sources of such material, the duties incumbent upon the Universal House of Justice, the limited resources available to carry out the necessary work at this time, the priority of certain steps, and the defense of the Faith against the machinations of its enemies and the naïveté of some of its faithful followers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

305.5 Appendix I³⁰⁵⁻²

305.6 Appendix II

POLICIES GOVERNING AUTHORIZED AND
PROVISIONAL TRANSLATIONS OF THE BAHÁ'Í HOLY WRITINGS
INTO ENGLISH AND THEIR PUBLICATION

4 JULY 1999

305.7 The principal purpose of these policies is to extend the use of provisional translations to publication in books and pamphlets, provided that they are of adequate quality, without involving the delays which would be required to have them thoroughly reviewed, corrected and polished.

305-2. See no. 302, pp. 674–76.

1. Tablets, or extracts therefrom, translated into English for use or publication by the Bahá'í World Center will continue to be reviewed by an ad hoc translation and review committee at the World Center and designated as authorized translations.
2. Individual believers are free to translate into English any of the Holy Writings for their own use. Such translations may also be issued electronically, and may be published in circulars or journals without review by anyone other than the editors of the publications, but they must, in all cases, be clearly labeled as “provisional translations.”
3. If such translations are to be included in books or pamphlets intended for publication by a Bahá'í publisher, the Trust or private publisher involved should forward the manuscript to the Bahá'í World Center for clearance, together with copies of the Arabic or Persian texts used in the translation. If the publisher is not a Bahá'í agency, the authors or translators themselves should forward the manuscript and the Arabic or Persian texts to the Bahá'í World Center for consideration prior to the involvement of any non-Bahá'í publisher. If the translations are found to be of a quality adequate for publication, the manuscript will be returned to the sender with a note to this effect. Such translations should be identified as “provisional translations.” If the translations are found not to be of acceptable quality, they will be returned to the translator for reworking. This procedure does not replace the normal review process for the book as a whole, which remains the responsibility of the National Spiritual Assembly within whose area of jurisdiction the book or pamphlet is to be published.

Appendix III

305.8

POLICIES GOVERNING THE PUBLICATION AND TRANSLATION
OF BAHÁ'Í HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

4 JULY 1999

In view of the increasing interest being shown by individual Bahá'ís in the publication of documents describing historical events of the Bahá'í community and, where necessary, their translation into English and their publication in that language, the following policies have been formulated to accelerate and simplify the process of granting the necessary approval. 305.9

305.10 It should be noted that, in this context, a “historical document” indicates a document written some time ago either in the course of the events or as a memoir recording events. A historical account now being written by a Bahá’í does not come under these policies but would follow the normal pre-publication review process.

1. **Historical documents in the sole possession of the Bahá’í World Center:**

305.11 The Universal House of Justice envisages the implementation of a planned process of the examination, cataloging and categorization of all historical documents held by the World Center of the Faith, to be followed, or possibly accompanied, by a program for the preparation of such documents for publication, in facsimile, in the form of transcripts, and, where appropriate, accompanied by a translation into English.

2. **Historical documents which are in the hands of members of the Bahá’í community:**

305.12 It is noted that there are many historical documents which have already been published in the original language, as well as an undetermined number of memoirs and other manuscripts which are in the hands of individual Bahá’ís and Bahá’í families. Of these the House of Justice has concern only over those documents which relate to the history of the Faith in Iran, the Arab countries, the Holy Land or other sensitive areas. In relation to these it has established the policies listed below. The publication and translation of all other historical documents is adequately covered by the normal process of review.

305.13 2.1 In countries such as those instanced above, serious danger to the Bahá’í communities could be precipitated by the untimely publication (with or without translation) of historical documents relating to events there. Therefore, every proposal to publish or translate a document relating to the history of the Faith in the Middle East must be referred to the Universal House of Justice for its approval.

- 2.2 A Bahá'í who has a copy of a historical document and considers publishing it, should, out of courtesy, consult the immediate family of the writer, seeking their agreement to the publication, before proceeding. 305.14
- 2.3 When the House of Justice has approved the publication, and/or translation, of a historical document, it should be published in full, without deletions, to preserve the integrity of the document as an entity. If it is decided to publish only the most interesting and publishable portions of a document, the publication should be clearly designated as an abridged version of the work in question or as extracts from it. 305.15
- 2.4 In most, if not all, cases of the publication of a historical document, it will be desirable for an introduction, footnotes and possibly appendices to be added. At the present time, such additions should be kept to a minimum and should not constitute a mass of supplementary material disproportionate to the document itself. 305.16
- 2.5 It would be inappropriate for the translation of a Tablet to appear for the first time as a footnote or appendix to such a document. 305.17
- 2.6 The publication of the original of a historical document, with or without a translation, after being approved in principle by the Universal House of Justice, will require a special kind of review. Bearing in mind that the basic purpose of review is to ensure that a publication gives an accurate impression of the Faith, the reviewers will have to give attention to the following points: 305.18
- 2.6.1 The accuracy of the introduction and footnotes and any other material added to the document itself. 305.18a
 - 2.6.2 The need for additional footnotes to clarify points of which the document itself may give a misleading or inadequate impression. 305.18b
 - 2.6.3 The advisability of deleting superfluous footnotes or other supplementary material. 305.18c
 - 2.6.4 The quality of the translation. The reviewing committee cannot be expected to check the accu- 305.18d

racy of the translation, but it should give attention to the quality of expression and the meaning it conveys, and raise questions or make suggestions where necessary. If the number of such points would be large, the whole translation should be referred back to the translator for reworking.

306

Publication of Bahá'í Sacred Texts with a Study Guide

4 JULY 1999

To all Bahá'í Publishing Trusts

306.1 Recently the Universal House of Justice clarified an issue related to publication of Bahá'í Sacred Texts as follows:

306.2 The House of Justice feels that it would not be proper to publish a full-text edition of a Bahá'í Sacred Text incorporating a study guide.

306.3 This is not to say that study guides may not include comments on all aspects of the texts under study. They may also cite extensively from any of the Bahá'í Writings, but such works should in no way become substitutes for the basic texts as normally published.

306.4 The purpose of this decision is to distinguish clearly between the Sacred Texts themselves and study guides or commentaries written upon them, since the latter are not authoritative. The Texts should remain free of any impression that the views of the author of any study guide are necessarily to be followed in gaining an understanding of the Holy Writings.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

307

The Advancement of Women

5 AUGUST 1999

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

307.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 30 May 1999 . . . and has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice is pleased to note that you are planning to give ^{307.2} greater attention to the advancement of women in both the internal functioning of your Bahá'í community and in your external affairs activities. The establishment of an Office for the Advancement of Women has the potential to provide a powerful reinforcement to the efforts of the believers in this important aspect of Bahá'í endeavor. In response to your question about the appointment of a member of your National Spiritual Assembly as the director of the Office, the House of Justice feels that this matter should be left to your discretion; however, it advises you to consider carefully the possibility that the appointment of a member, or of a close family relative of a member, could well be misunderstood by your Bahá'í community and thus create a negative impression. You are encouraged to seek the views of the Counselors on this point, and indeed on the other aspects of the new initiative you are now planning.

You have in several places referred to your distress at the attitudes and ^{307.3} conduct of some male members of the Bahá'í community concerning the advancement of women, in their regarding it as an issue which concerns only women, or reacting to it through immoderate language or inappropriate humor. In assisting them to acquire an understanding that they have a vital role to play in the implementation of this principle of the Faith, you have many possible approaches from which to select. For example, their participation in a careful study of the compilation on women would serve to bring to their attention those passages in the document which refer clearly to the efforts which are required of men. A contemplation of the peerless example of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá should include a study of His actions and statements to advance the status and development of women. The messages of the House of Justice, calling upon all elements of the Bahá'í community for a greater commitment to the advancement of women, must also be given due weight in considering the responsibility of men in this regard.

Your recommendation that the compilation on women be revised is ^{307.4} noted, and will be considered in due course, most especially as the amount of material to be included in it expands with elucidations of the House of Justice in response to the needs of the developing Bahá'í community. The experience you mention, that of individuals focusing on only one passage from the present document and using it as a vehicle in attempting to press their views on an individual who has a different understanding, is not solved simply by a reordering of the passages; rather it points to a need for deeper study and more careful reading, by which is obtained a comprehensive un-

derstanding of this complex subject such that all passages are seen to be elements of a harmonious whole. In striving to attain this state, account must also be taken of the statements of the House of Justice in the Introduction to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* concerning the progressive clarification and progressive application of the laws of the Faith through the instrumentality of the Covenant.

³⁰⁷⁵ You refer to the view which exists in some quarters of your community, based apparently on a passage written on behalf of the Guardian to two believers in response to a particular situation, that it is not appropriate to create Bahá'í agencies such as an Office for the Advancement of Women or to hold meetings to which only women are invited. Such a view ignores the clear advice and encouragement set out in several messages of the House of Justice concerning the implementation of the principle of equality of the sexes, or the actions it has taken in setting up an Office for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations Office in New York. Attention should also be drawn to the letter of 25 May 1975 from the House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in which reference is made to eighty National Spiritual Assemblies being called upon specifically to organize Bahá'í activities for women.³⁰⁷⁻¹ Passages in the compilation on women include the call by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for "women's assemblages," His mention of some of the subjects which should be discussed at such gatherings, and His warning against an approach which would lead to greater disharmony and argumentation between men and women. Thus those men who are apprehensive about meetings of women can be reassured that these Bahá'í gatherings would not degenerate into the contentiousness and antagonism toward males which appears in some such meetings organized by radical or extremist elements in the wider society.

³⁰⁷⁶ In the conduct of your activities for the advancement of women, you should take great care to avoid unquestioning acceptance of approaches and themes which influence the efforts toward that end in the world around you. Statistics on the participation of women on Bahá'í institutions are compiled from time to time by Bahá'í agencies, including the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office for the Advancement of Women, and have been published on occasion in the annual *Bahá'í World* year book. However, caution should be observed in their interpretation, because of

307-1. MUHJ, no. 162.

the small size of the Bahá'í communities in most countries, and the differences in the traditional attitudes toward the participation of women in the various cultures represented in the worldwide community. It would also be improper to use these results in an attempt to ensure that the composition of institutions is evenly balanced between the sexes, since believers are enjoined to select those best qualified to serve, irrespective of their sex. The Faith does not seek to promote the advancement of women through an artificial endeavor to achieve parity, but rather through a fundamental transformation of values and understanding coupled with the creation of opportunities and encouragement for the development of talents and capabilities.

Likewise, Bahá'í institutions are admonished in the teachings to consider the welfare and sentiments of all elements of their community in their decision-making, and to create opportunities for all to participate in consultation at gatherings such as the Nineteen Day Feast. 307.7

The sharing of Bahá'í material developed in one country with others can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including use of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women, as well as advertising in your [national newsletter]. 307.8

Your comments on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women illustrate the point made earlier about the need for care in determining the extent to which the Bahá'í community should identify with the initiatives of non-Bahá'í bodies. A document such as the Convention should be studied to ascertain whether the provisions are, in fact, wholly compatible with the Bahá'í teachings. As you are aware, the Faith upholds the equality of the sexes but specifies a differentiation of functions in some areas, such as educational priorities when resources are limited, service in armed defense forces, membership of the Universal House of Justice, exemption from certain laws in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, intestacy provisions, and so on, which could be perceived as effecting a discrimination between men and women. 307.9

You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, as you embark on a process which could well prove to be a powerful means of promoting the interests of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in . . . and beyond. 307.10

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

308

Message to the Indigenous Teaching Conference in Sucre, Bolivia

20 AUGUST 1999

Friends gathered at the Indigenous
Teaching Conference in Sucre, Bolivia
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{308.1} In recent years a number of conferences and meetings of consultation have taken place among the indigenous believers of Latin America, from which have emanated spiritual forces of considerable magnitude. As you gather once again, your hearts must surely be uplifted by the progress that has resulted from your previous deliberations. You are well aware of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promise about your future, and you are systematically moving towards that future with unshakable resolve and confidence. The Four Year Plan has brought new strength to the Bahá'í community through the work of training institutes. You should seize upon the opportunities that these institutes offer so that an increasing number of you can enhance your capacity to actively engage in the spiritual and material education of your peoples. That you may be divinely assisted in discharging this vital task is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

309

Response to Earthquake in Turkey

24 AUGUST 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{309.1} The historic associations of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh with Turkey, a land held sacred in the hearts of Bahá'ís, make of the disaster wreaked by the recent earthquake an event of inexpressible sorrow for the Bahá'í world. While we are relieved to have received reports that the lives of our coreligionists were spared, we grieve with all those who have suffered incalculable loss both from the deaths in the thousands of their fellow-citizens and from

the extensive destruction of property. In addition to our fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the bereaved and distressed, we have arranged for a financial contribution to be made towards relief efforts. Moreover, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations has been asked to convey to the President of Turkey heartfelt condolences on behalf of our world community.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

310

Deputization and Funding for the Training Institutes

24 AUGUST 1999

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

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following ^{310.1} reply to your inquiry of 14 July 1999 concerning the funding of training institutes.

Your letter has offered the House of Justice a welcome opportunity to ^{310.2} clarify certain points regarding deputization, and for this it is grateful. It has also noted with warm appreciation the generosity of your offer not only to raise funds in support of training institutes in different parts of the world but also to strive to meet any financial goal it may wish to specify towards this end. While the friends would no doubt respond well to such a goal, a fundraising approach would not be in keeping with the sense of the appeal made in the Riḍván 153 message to the Bahá'ís of the world for the deputization of teachers by individuals. As that message stated:

“Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá'u'lláh ^{310.3} thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation. . . .”³¹⁰⁻¹ Just as one deputizes another to teach in one's stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to

310-1. GWB, no. 96.3.

the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

310.4 The individual's duty to teach is the primary point here. Deputizing one's own appointed substitute is also highly recommended for one who can afford to do so. The individual can always exercise the right to choose directly the one he or she wishes to deputize; but often the person wanting to provide deputization is unable to identify or select a deputy. For anyone finding himself or herself in this latter position, the International Deputization Fund established by the Universal House of Justice in 1965 has continued to exist. The new element introduced by the Riḍván 153 message is the teacher at a training institute, whose financial support by another would fulfill the purpose of deputization. The range of choice for the individual wishing to deputize someone has thus been expanded. To realize one's purpose in this regard, one may channel one's financial support of a training institute teacher through whatever institution of the Fund is convenient to one. The emphasis on the Continental Fund in this case is significant for the convenience it provides, since it is through the Boards of Counselors that training institutes needing such support can most readily be identified, and it is through the Continental Fund that the most direct routing of a contribution to its specific destination can be effected. Thus the earmarked contributions channeled through the Local or National Fund would ultimately be turned over to the relevant Continental Fund for delivery to its intended destination outside your community.

310.5 It is clear, then, that this new element in deputization is not a question of supporting any Bahá'í Fund and cannot strictly speaking be dealt with as a Fund issue, even though an institution of the Fund must act, in this case, as a channel for the individual's intention. It is essentially a matter of teaching, and it is in this context that the appeal for deputization must be understood by all concerned. Obviously, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies are expected to inform the friends of the importance of Bahá'u'lláh's instruction and to encourage action in this regard as an appropriate response by individuals to the duty of teaching.

310.6 With the creation of training institutes across the globe, an added opportunity for a more direct involvement in deputization presents itself to the individual; the House of Justice trusts therefore that the friends can be helped to feel some connection with the specific centers of teaching activity to which their offerings for deputization are sent. It is for this reason that the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries have been called upon to play

a distinctive role in this matter as officers bearing a particular responsibility for propagation, for the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants operate at the grassroots of the community and are able readily not only to stimulate individuals to teach but also to urge them, if their material circumstances allow, to respond to the need for deputization. By being able to provide detailed information about current needs, they can make their presentations immediately relevant to any interest shown by the friends. This is why the House of Justice has asked that the Counselors keep their Auxiliary Board members apprised of the level of deputization required by institutes in various regions so that they can make this information available to those who wish to pursue this new possibility.

While, therefore, the Auxiliary Board members are not being asked to solicit funds in the sense of raising money in support of the Continental or any other Fund, they do have the task of arousing commitment to the teaching work, which includes acts of deputization, and they have access to updated relevant information that is needed by friends interested in deputizing. In this connection, the action of these officers of the Faith is directed to individuals and not to Local Spiritual Assemblies or other institutions. They, of course, share with Spiritual Assemblies the responsibility of promoting interest in deputization as an aspect of the teaching work, but their mode of operation places them in an advantageous position to reach individuals in effective, intimate settings. 310.7

In sum, the call for deputization falls within the framework of teaching and depends on individual response, as with pioneering. To establish a deputization fund goal would be to loosen the believers' grasp of this important characteristic of Bahá'í life, which enhances individual motivation towards and direct involvement in the teaching work. The Bahá'í institutions must do all they can to facilitate this special expression of individual responsibility towards promulgating the Cause: the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries in the manner described above, the Spiritual Assemblies by encouraging it and providing useful information, the Bahá'í Funds by funneling deputization contributions. Given the situation in the United States, the following advice is offered in reply to your expressed wish to take some action: 310.8

1. The adoption of a financial goal for training institute deputization is not required, but you will want to underscore the importance of deputization by keeping this matter before the friends.
2. An aspect of collaboration with the Counselors would be for them to share with you regularly the updated information they receive

from the International Teaching Center on the current needs of training institutes throughout the world.

3. You could offer information and advice to the friends throughout the community as to how the various funds may facilitate their wish to contribute towards the deputization of teachers functioning at training institutes in other countries.
4. You will want to make sure that appropriate mechanisms exist for transmitting to the respective Continental Funds the financial assistance to training institute teachers that the friends pay to the Local and National Funds, together with information as to the wishes of the donors.

310.9 The House of Justice is confident that in these and other ways you may devise in consultation with the Counselors you will be able to give effective support to individual efforts at deputization and thus ensure an outstanding place for your community in this vital endeavor.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

311

Martyrdom of Bahá'í in Tajikistan

5 OCTOBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

311.1 The Universal House of Justice has requested us to announce the martyrdom by assassination of Mr. Abdullah Mogharrabi, steadfast and devoted pioneer of the Faith to Tajikistan.

311.2 After spending the majority of his years in the Cradle of the Faith, serving in various teaching and administrative capacities, he left Iran, upon the advice of the institutions when his life was in danger, to settle elsewhere. He resided a few years in the United Kingdom, close to his daughter, before pioneering to Tajikistan where he had been a pillar of strength to that community since the inception of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1994. He was the Secretary of that institution for all but one year of his time in Tajikistan.

311.3 The manner in which he was killed leaves no doubt that the attack was carried out by fanatical elements in the country. It is significant that in 1993

one of the Iranian newspapers mentioned his name abusively, accusing him of anti-Islamic activities aimed at deceiving the Muslims in Tajikistan.

He was killed during the evening of Friday, 24 September 1999. The Bahá'í friends who participated with the authorities in the investigation of his death reported that Mr. Mogharrabi's hands had been tied behind his back, he had been gagged and was forced to lie face down; there were signs of torture over his body. He was shot in the back, the bullet piercing his heart. His room was left untouched, and the money which he held in various currencies was not taken. The front door to the house had been left open, which attracted the attention of neighbors a few hours after the incident. 311.4

His sacrifice will certainly draw fresh confirmations upon the efforts of the Bahá'í community in Tajikistan and neighboring countries. Despite his advanced age, 88, he tirelessly served the people of this country and its Bahá'í community, providing a true example to us all of devotion to the Faith. In one of his letters to the Bahá'í World Center some time ago, he had expressed his desire to give his last breath as a martyr of the Faith. Mr. Mogharrabi's illustrious life reminds us all of the statement made by the Blessed Beauty in the Hidden Words: 311.5

O SON OF MAN! 311.5a

Ponder and reflect. Is it thy wish to die upon thy bed, or to shed thy life-blood on the dust, a martyr in My path, and so become the manifestation of My command and the revealer of My light in the highest paradise? Judge thou aright, O servant!³¹¹⁻¹

The House of Justice prays for the progress of his soul, and extends its loving sympathy to the members of his family. It will also supplicate on behalf of the believers in Tajikistan, a country in which Mr. Mogharrabi was proffered the crown of martyrdom. 311.6

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

311-1. HW, Arabic, no. 46.

312

Correspondence from the Bahá'í World Center

9 NOVEMBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

312.1 As the work of the Bahá'í World Center steadily increases, the Universal House of Justice, in order to concentrate on matters requiring its direct attention, has progressively referred to various Departments subjects that can be handled in other ways.

312.2 We have been asked to inform you of a new development in this respect. As you may know, in addition to the ongoing responsibility exercised by the Secretariat of the House of Justice, the Office of Correspondence has been responding to a small percentage of relatively routine requests and inquiries made to the World Center. Arrangements have now been made for that Office to handle a broader range of such correspondence, over its own signature, following policies laid down for this purpose. The House of Justice trusts that these new arrangements will further improve communication between the World Center and the Bahá'í world.

312.3 Communications to the Bahá'í World Center should continue to be addressed as indicated in the *International Bahá'í Directory*.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

313

One and Five Year Plans

26 NOVEMBER 1999

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

313.1 On this special day, when our hearts and thoughts are focused on the immortal example set by the life of the Center of the Covenant, we pause to note, with feelings of deep gratitude, the current progress of the Divine Plan which He conceived, and to glance at the future beyond the four-year stage now rapidly coming to an end.

The accomplishments during this period are encouraging indeed. An impressive network of training institutes on a scale but dimly imagined at the start of the Plan has been established throughout the world. These nascent centers of learning have made significant strides in developing formal programs and in putting into place effective systems for the delivery of courses. Reports indicate that the number of believers benefiting directly from training courses has climbed to nearly 100,000. Without question, the capacity of the worldwide community to develop its human resources has been distinctly enhanced. 313.2

The effects of this systematic approach to human resource development are making themselves felt in the lives of all three protagonists of the Plan—the individual believer, the institutions, and the local community. There has been an upsurge in teaching activities undertaken at the initiative of the individual. Spiritual Assemblies, Councils, and committees have grown in their ability to guide the believers in their individual and collective endeavors. And community life has flourished, even in localities long dormant, as new patterns of thought and behavior have emerged. 313.3

As we survey the Bahá'í world, we see a greatly strengthened community, internally sound and notably reinforced. Its achievements in reaching the general public, governments and organizations of civil society and in winning trust in all these circles are striking. Agencies specialized in external affairs, following a well-defined strategy, have broadened the range of the Faith's influence nationally and internationally, and projects of social and economic development, which seek the spiritual and material upliftment of entire communities, are penetrating society at the grassroots. 313.4

The two stages in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan lying immediately ahead will last one year and five years respectively. At Ríḍván 2000 the Bahá'í world will be asked to embark on the first of these two stages, a twelve-month effort aimed at concentrating the forces, the capacities and the insights that have so strongly emerged. The Five Year Plan that follows will initiate a series of worldwide enterprises that will carry the Bahá'í community through the final twenty years in the first century of the Faith's Formative Age. These global Plans will continue to focus on advancing the process of entry by troops and on its systematic acceleration. 313.5

It is essential that, during the one-year effort, national and regional institutes everywhere bring into full operation the programs and systems that they have now devised. National communities should enter the Five Year Plan confident that the acquisition of knowledge, qualities and skills of ser- 313.6

vice by large contingents of believers, with the aid of a sequence of courses, will proceed unhindered. Ample attention must also be given to further systematization of teaching efforts, whether undertaken by the individual or directed by the institutions. In this respect, the International Teaching Center has identified certain patterns of systematic expansion and consolidation for relatively small geographical areas consisting of a manageable number of localities. Through the collaboration of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies, several "Area Growth Programs" are being established in each continent. They will be carefully monitored during the Twelve Month Plan and their methods will be refined so that this approach can be incorporated into subsequent Plans.

313.7 Strategies to advance the process of entry by troops cannot ignore children and junior youth, if the victories won in one generation are not to be lost with the passage of time. It is imperative, then, that at this point in the process of systematization of the teaching work, definite steps be taken to ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger members. The education of children, an obligation enjoined on both parents and institutions, requires special emphasis so as to become thoroughly integrated into the process of community development. This activity should be taken to new levels of intensity during these twelve months and then be further raised in the years immediately after. That the programs of most institutes in the world provide for the training of children's class teachers represents an element of strength. Spiritual Assemblies and Auxiliary Board members will need to mobilize these newly trained human resources to meet the spiritual requirements of children and junior youth.

313.8 The period of the Twelve Month Plan will be marked by great activity in society at large as the twentieth century draws to a close. Already keen interest is being shown by leaders of thought in the destiny of the coming generations, and we hope that the fervor of the Bahá'í community, both in its internal operation and its interactions with society, will convey a sense of confidence in the future of humanity.

313.9 We will pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá'u'lláh will bless your exertions to bring the Four Year Plan to a triumphal conclusion.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

314

Interfaith Gathering in India in the Presence of Pope John Paul II

12 DECEMBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

The Universal House of Justice has received with joy reports of the public interreligious gathering organized by the Roman Catholic Church in New Delhi in the presence of Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to India. Designated representatives of the different religions were invited to briefly address the gathering, and Mrs. Zena Sorabjee spoke on behalf of the Bahá'ís. Such was the importance of this event as a further step in the recognition of the Faith as a major religion in India that the Universal House of Justice wished to share with you copies of Mrs. Sorabjee's address and a description of the occasion based on reports received from the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Mrs. Sorabjee. 314.1

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

315

Application of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

28 DECEMBER 1999

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Beloved Friends,

In the course of the Four Year Plan, we have been reviewing those laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which are not yet universally applied, in order to determine which of them it would be timely to implement now. 315.1

In every land we see a growing thirst for spiritual life and moral clarity. There is recognition of the ineffectiveness of plans and programs for human betterment which are not rooted in lives of spiritual awareness and ethical virtue. Who should be better equipped to satisfy this longing than those who are already inspired by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and aided by His Power? 315.2

We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community. 315.3

The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá'ís, but acquiring greater insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day.

315.4 Bahá'u'lláh asserts: "One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."

315.5 The friends have long been familiar with the great importance which Bahá'u'lláh attaches to daily obligatory prayer and to the observance of the fast, but a number of aspects of the law, such as those concerning ablutions, traveling and the compensation for prayers missed, remained to be made universally applicable. This step is now taken. Thus all elements of the laws dealing with obligatory prayer and fasting are, without any exception, now applicable.

315.6 We have also decided that it is timely for Bahá'ís in every land to take to their hearts the words of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgment, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat 'Alláh-u-Abhá' ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names."³¹⁵⁻¹ Let all experience the spiritual enrichment brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation.

315.7 The spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as a community and by service to the Faith and to one's fellow human beings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* which appears in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Although the time has not come for the building of local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, the holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá'í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá'í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

315-1. KA, ¶18.

Bahá'u'lláh has written: “We have adorned the heaven of utterance with the stars of divine wisdom and holy ordinances as a bounty on Our part. Verily, We are the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. O friends of God throughout the regions! Know ye the value of these days and cling unto whatsoever hath been sent down from God, the Most Great, the Most Exalted. Verily, He remembereth you in the Most Great Prison, and instructeth you in that which will cause you to draw nigh unto a station that delighteth the eyes of the pure in heart. Glory rest upon you and upon those who have attained unto that living fountain which floweth forth from My wondrous Pen.” 315.8

It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the greater attention to the spiritual heart of the Teachings which these laws express will enhance the devotion of the friends to the Source of all bounties and attract to the Cause the receptive souls among His spiritually famished children. 315.9

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

316

Passing of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum

19 JANUARY 2000

To the Bahá'ís of the World

In the early hours of this morning, the soul of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, beloved consort of Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá'í world's last remaining link with the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was released from the limitations of this earthly existence. In the midst of our grief, we are sustained by our confidence that she has been gathered to the glory of the Concourse on High in the presence of the Abhá Beauty. 316.1

For all whose hearts she touched so deeply, the sorrow that this irreparable loss brings will, in God's good time, be assuaged in awareness of the joy that is hers through her reunion with the Guardian and with the Master, Who had Himself prayed in the Most Holy Shrine that her parents be blessed with a child. Down the centuries to come, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will contemplate with wonder and gratitude the quality of the services—ardent, indomitable, resourceful—that she brought to the protection and promotion of the Cause. 316.2

316.3 In her youth, Amatu'l-Bahá had already distinguished herself through her activities in North America, and later, both with her dear mother and on her own, she had rendered valuable service to the Cause in Europe. Her twenty years of intimate association with Shoghi Effendi evoked from his pen such accolades as “my helpmate,” “my shield,” “my tireless collaborator in the arduous tasks I shoulder.” To these tributes he added in 1952 his decision to elevate her to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God, after the death of her illustrious father.

316.4 The devastating shock of the beloved Guardian’s passing steeled her resolve to lend her share, with the other Hands of the Cause, to the triumph of the Ten Year Crusade, and subsequently to undertake, with characteristic intrepidity, her historic worldwide travels.

316.5 A life so noble in its provenance, so crucial to the preservation of the Faith’s integrity, and so rich in its dedicated, uninterrupted and selfless service, moves us to call for befitting commemorations by Bahá’í communities on both national and local levels, as well as for special gatherings in her memory in all Houses of Worship.

316.6 With yearning hearts, we supplicate at the Holy Threshold for infinite heavenly bounties to surround her soul, as she assumes her rightful and well-earned position among the exalted company in the Abhá Kingdom.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

317

Invitation to Members of National Spiritual Assemblies for Funeral Service in Holy Land for Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum

19 JANUARY 2000

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

317.1 The Universal House of Justice, recognizing the longing of friends in every part of the world to pay their tribute to the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, has decided that one or, at the most, two members of each National Spiritual Assembly are permitted and welcome to come to the Holy Land to attend her funeral, if financial and other circumstances allow them to do so. The funeral will take place in Haifa at

2 o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday 23 January 2000. Kindly inform the Bahá'í World Center immediately of the name(s) of your member(s) who will be coming.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

318

Funeral Service for Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum

26 JANUARY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to its message of 19 January 2000 concerning the passing of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following. 318.1

On the afternoon of 23 January, in a light rain, the blessed remains of Rúhíyyih Khánum were laid to rest in Haifa, following a funeral service at the House of the Master and graveside prayers attended by more than 1100 believers. The interment took place in a plot of land which had been converted into a garden by Shoghi Effendi, directly across the street from the Master's House. The participants came from near and far, and included 24 Continental Counselors, representatives of 76 National Spiritual Assemblies, and pilgrims, as well as members of the institutions and volunteers serving at the Bahá'í World Center. Among them, too, were senior officials from the Canadian and United States embassies, representatives of the Israeli government, the mayors of 'Akká and Haifa, and other prominent Israeli citizens. 318.2

The House of Justice is deeply gratified that such a wide representation of believers was able to come to the Holy Land on very short notice to pay final respects on behalf of all the friends throughout the world who could not be present. Moreover, it warmly appreciates the various expressions of sympathy and love received at the World Center through many messages and gifts of flowers. It is also pleased that news of Rúhíyyih Khánum's passing and funeral has been given coverage by the world press and electronic media. 318.3

Enclosed for your interest is a copy of the printed program of the funeral service. 318.4

318.5 Without doubt, the memory of a life so inestimably precious, so extraordinarily dynamic as that of Amatu'l-Bahá will infuse the Bahá'í institutions and individual friends everywhere with renewed resolve and redoubled energy.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

319

Passing of Adib Taherzadeh, Member of the Universal House of Justice

27 JANUARY 2000

To the Bahá'ís of the World

319.1 The passing of our dearly loved coworker, Adib Taherzadeh, has deepened our sorrows. We recall with admiration his devoted and unremitting services to the Cause of God for over half a century. His exemplary enthusiasm for the teaching work and his capacity to inspire the believers endeared him to all who knew him. As a self-sacrificing pioneer, as a champion of the Covenant, as a member of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the British Isles and of the Republic of Ireland, as a member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Europe, and as a member of the Universal House of Justice, he evinced complete consecration, unshakeable faith, and unyielding resolve.

319.2 At an early point in his life he was seized by the desire to make available to his fellow believers in the West the riches of the history and teachings of the Faith. It was this longing that found expression in the body of writings that will remain forever associated with his memory.

319.3 We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family, most particularly to his dear wife and beloved children, and assure them of our fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for bountiful rewards to be vouchsafed to him in the Abhá Kingdom.

319.4 All National Assemblies are advised to hold memorial gatherings in his name, including devotional programs in his honor in all Houses of Worship.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

320

Passing of Abaineh Merhatsion, Member of Continental Board of Counselors for Africa

10 FEBRUARY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia

The untimely passing of much-loved and highly admired Abaineh Merhatsion has filled our hearts with sorrow. His self-effacement, wisdom and patience combined to leave after him a record of exemplary service, including his membership on the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia, and subsequently on the Continental Board of Counselors for Africa. Kindly convey to his dear family the assurance of our fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his noble soul in the Abhá Kingdom. 320.1

We advise you to hold memorial gatherings in his honor throughout Ethiopia, and are requesting all National Spiritual Assemblies on the African Continent to hold similar meetings. The National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda is being asked to hold a memorial service at the Mother Temple of Africa. 320.2

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

321

Three Bahá'ís in Iran Sentenced to Death

11 FEBRUARY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

The Universal House of Justice has just received from Iran the distressing news that death sentences have been reaffirmed for two members of the Bahá'í community there and a further death sentence has been passed on a third believer. 321.1

You will recall that our letter dated 14 November 1997 informed you that three friends—Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid Nasirizadeh—were arrested in Mashhad in late 1997. Early in 1998, branch #8 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad sentenced the first two to death and Mr. Nasirizadeh to ten years' imprisonment. It was the same court that sentenced to death Mr. Ruhollah Rohani, who was executed on 21 July of that year. The three other sentences were 321.2

subsequently set aside by the Supreme Court on the grounds that the prisoners had not been permitted to have lawyers for their defense, as entitled under the law, and a retrial was accordingly ordered. That retrial took place in branch #3 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, and in October 1998 the original verdicts were reaffirmed. An appeal was subsequently made. (See our email of 1 December 1998.)

321.3 On 28 May 1999, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Representative, Professor Maurice Copithorne, was assured by Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva that "the Supreme Court decided to reject the verdict of capital punishment for the defendants and sent their cases to another competent court for a retrial." . . . We have now been informed that the verdicts, which were conveyed orally to the prisoners on 3 February, confirm the previous sentences: death for Mr. Zabihi-Moghaddam and Mr. Kashefi-Najafabadi and ten years' imprisonment in Kirman for Mr. Nasirizadeh.

321.4 Further, the same court has now imposed a death sentence on Mr. Manuchehr Khulusi, who had been arrested in Birjand some eight months ago and subsequently transferred to the prison in Mashhad. It is not known what charges were brought against Mr. Khulusi, but it is clear that he was arrested because of his Bahá'í activities.

321.5 The court that rendered these judgments is composed of a single judge, a Mr. Ni'mati. The prisoners have been given only 20 days to lodge a protest against their sentences, in which circumstance their cases may then be referred to a second court for review. As you will note, part of this very brief period has already elapsed and, at this point, the outcome of their protest is not certain.

321.6 Relatives of the prisoners have appealed for international action to prevent the carrying out of the verdicts and the imminent execution of three innocent individuals. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

322

Passing of Laurie Arbab, Former Member of National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia and Director of Ruhi Institute

18 FEBRUARY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia

DEEPLY SADDENED UNTIMELY PASSING DEAR LAURIE ARBAB WHOSE PURITY 322.1
HEART, STEADFASTNESS PURPOSE DISTINGUISHED HER NEARLY FOUR DECADES
SERVICE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, INCLUDING PERIOD MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLY COLOMBIA. AS DIRECTOR OF ORIGINAL RUHI INSTITUTE SHE FORGED
METHODS, MORALE, MATERIALS OF DYNAMIC APPROACH TO ADVANCEMENT CAUSE.
WORLD CENTER GREATLY INDEBTED HER SUBSEQUENT CONTRIBUTION CURATOR
HOLY PLACES' HISTORICAL COLLECTION.

EXTEND LOVING CONDOLENCES FAMILY, FRIENDS, ASSURING OUR HEARTFELT 322.2
PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS SOUL.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

323

Passing of Mildred Mottahedeh

20 FEBRUARY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

We are deeply grieved at the passing of Mildred Mottahedeh, so es- 323.1
teemed, so greatly loved, so staunch and trusted a supporter and defender
of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. With her departure from this earthly life the
Bahá'í world community has lost an outstanding figure of the opening ep-
ochs of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

Her more than half a century of tireless endeavor in its service involved 323.2
her in teaching and administrative activities at the local, national, conti-
nental and international levels. At the same time she maintained a rigorous
schedule as a businesswoman, a contributor to the arts, and a promoter of
humanitarian works. To these manifold tasks, she brought the combined
resources of a selfless spirit, a compassionate heart, a creative mind, a practi-
cal sense, and a leonine will tempered by humility, candor and wit.

323.3 She remained for almost three decades at the forefront of the external affairs work of the Bahá'í International Community and in the service of the world center of the Faith, culminating in her membership on the International Bahá'í Council, the first globally elected Bahá'í body.

323.4 With assured hearts, we supplicate in the Holy Shrines for the progress of her illumined soul throughout the divine worlds. Our loving sympathy is extended to the members of her family and all others who mourn her loss. National Spiritual Assemblies are urged to hold befitting memorial gatherings in her honor in all Houses of Worship and other centers.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

324

Clarification on Application of Bahá'í Laws

23 FEBRUARY 2000

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

324.1 The Universal House of Justice received your emailed letter of 6 February 2000 and appreciates your suggestion for a procedure to be followed when Bahá'í laws are applied. You provide a very interesting perspective and the House of Justice has asked us to send you the following comments.

324.2 The way in which the House of Justice currently takes such actions is largely dictated by the nature of the law in each case and on the condition of the Bahá'í community at the time. The method adopted may not be suitable for publication in a special legal bulletin or for the specification of the sacred Texts on which the law rests.

324.3 The fundamental aspects of the laws of obligatory prayer and fasting have long been known to the believers and applied by them in varying degrees depending upon their awareness of their importance. The details which remained to be applied universally were quite secondary in relation to the vital spiritual significance of the laws themselves. It was with this in mind that the announcement made by the House of Justice did not go into such matters as the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Questions and Answers in which these details can be found. It wishes the friends to register in their understanding the basic concepts of these laws and the importance of observing them. Then, as individuals study the Texts, they will undoubt-

edly have questions which can be answered as they arise. In due course the House of Justice will provide National Spiritual Assemblies with references which they can use in replying to such questions.

You will note that the course followed in the universal application of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was different to the above. In that case the House of Justice circulated a compilation of the texts concerning Ḥuqúqu'lláh and a codification of the law for the believers to study and then, because a date of application was necessary, announced a specific date from which the law would be applied to all believers. Since that time, although the Deputies and Representatives of the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh have been actively pursuing the education of the friends in this law, they have been instructed not to attempt to give detailed answers to questions of computation, since this is something which the House of Justice has preferred to leave to the discretion of the individual believers as they themselves study the texts of the law and strive to apply it. 324.4

This approach to the application of laws into a community's life is clearly very different from the one you outline as being the norm in civil society, but the House of Justice feels that you will understand, at least in the case of these laws of conscience, why special approaches are desirable in order not to obscure the essentials of the laws by paying too much attention to detail in the initial stages. 324.5

There is, moreover, an aspect of Bahá'í law at the present time which differs from most civil laws, namely, that genuine ignorance of a law is acceptable as an excuse for not adhering to it. This makes possible the education of the Bahá'ís as laws are applied and also allows new believers time to accustom themselves to the principles and laws of the Faith. It is an important factor in the evolution of Bahá'í communities, institutions and individuals, whether observance is solely a matter of personal conscience, as in the case of the laws of prayer and fasting, or is enforceable by the institutions of the Cause as are the laws of marriage. 324.6

Undoubtedly, as the structure of Bahá'í law evolves, the Universal House of Justice will have to consider some general form or procedure for formalizing the application of laws and this may well include publication in a specified bulletin, as you indicate is the procedure in relation to civil law in certain countries. 324.7

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

325

Registration of Bahá'í Marriages in Iran

28 FEBRUARY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

325.1 The Universal House of Justice has just received news concerning action by the Iranian government that will have the important effect of permitting the registration of Bahá'í marriages in that country. For quite a number of years, as you know, the Bahá'í community of Iran has been seeking a way by which Bahá'í marriages and the birth of Bahá'í children could be officially registered and also validated on identity cards. The new situation could well have come about because of the high number of Bahá'í marriage cases and the steadfastness of the individuals involved in refusing to register their Bahá'í marriages under any other religious designation.

325.2 It has now been learned that the head of the Iranian judiciary recently issued a circular letter to all registry offices throughout the country, stating that any couple who appear before the latter officials, acknowledging that they are husband and wife, may be registered without being required to state their religious affiliation. An official certification may then be issued and supplied to the couple concerned. At the same time, the judiciary has issued a related instruction to the registry offices with respect to the issuance of birth certificates and identity cards. Couples whose personal status has been validated by the aforementioned official certification are now to have such information entered on their identity cards, acknowledging that they are recognized as husband and wife. Thereafter, they should experience no difficulty in registering children of the marriage.

325.3 This new development removes at a stroke one of the most troublesome problems that has long handicapped the members of the Iranian Bahá'í community. The arrangement provides ample proof of what Bahá'í representatives abroad have consistently maintained; namely, that the government of Iran is able, if it so wishes, to find ways within existing laws and regulations, to accord Bahá'ís the same freedoms enjoyed by all other Iranian citizens. . . .

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

326

Date for Formation of Regional Bahá'í Councils

12 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In a letter addressed to you under the date of 30 May 1997, the Universal House of Justice announced its decision to establish Regional Bahá'í Councils as a new element of Bahá'í administration, between the local and national levels.³²⁶⁻¹ These institutions are formed only with the permission of the House of Justice in certain countries where the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies requires this development. As specified by the House of Justice case by case for the countries directly concerned, a Regional Council is established either through election by the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in a region or through appointment by the National Spiritual Assembly, which receives recommendations of candidates from Local Spiritual Assemblies in the region. The date set for formation of Regional Councils has been 23 May, the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb according to the Gregorian calendar.

To keep you informed of essential aspects of the evolution of Regional Councils, we have been asked to convey the following.^{326.2}

In view of the experience gained over a period of several years, the House of Justice has recognized that it would be more practical to set a new date for the formation of these institutions. Henceforth, then, the election or appointment of Regional Councils will take effect every year on 26 November, the Day of the Covenant.^{326.3} The formation processes will, of course, have to be set in motion in sufficient time to be concluded on this date.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

326-1. See no. 250, pp. 582–93.

327
Election of New Member
to the Universal House of Justice

20 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

^{327.1} We warmly welcome Kiser Barnes as the newly elected member of the Universal House of Justice.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

328
The Training Institutes and Systematic Growth

23 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{328.1} The International Teaching Center has prepared the enclosed document entitled "Training Institutes and Systematic Growth," which represents a sequel to the one dated April 1998 on the subject of institutes made available to the delegates at the Eighth International Bahá'í Convention. The Universal House of Justice feels that the document will be of considerable interest to those concerned with the operation of training institutes.³²⁸⁻¹

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

328-1. The document entitled "Training Institutes and Systematic Growth" is published in *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material, 1996–2006* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2006).

329

Appointment of New Counselor to the International Teaching Center

28 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

With joyful hearts we announce the appointment of Zenaida Ramirez as ^{329.1}
a Counselor member of the International Teaching Center.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

330

Resignation and Membership on Regional Bahá'í Councils

16 APRIL 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice received your email letter . . . in which ^{330.1}
you ask a number of questions regarding resignation and membership on
Regional Bahá'í Councils. We have been asked to reply to you as follows . . .

To begin, we are reminded in letters written on behalf of the beloved ^{330.2}
Guardian that service as an elected member of a Bahá'í institution is “a
bounty, a privilege and a unique responsibility” which “all the friends should
stand ready to accept . . . unless they are definitely incapacitated and could
not possibly take up office.” Further, we find that,

. . . the Guardian wishes you to make clear to all the believers that ^{330.2a}
membership in a Bahá'í Assembly or Committee is a sacred obligation
which should be gladly and confidently accepted by every loyal and
conscientious member of the community, no matter how humble and
inexperienced.³³⁰⁻¹

330-1. DND, p. 79.

330.3 It is, therefore, clear that a member of an elected body such as a Regional Council in Brazil should not resign from serving, except in extremely rare cases. With this in mind, we turn to the questions raised in your email.

330.4 You indicate that one situation that has occurred is when a believer is elected to both a Regional Council and a Local Spiritual Assembly. Further, you state that the procedure you have adopted in such cases is the same as when a believer is elected to both the National Spiritual Assembly and a Local Spiritual Assembly, that is, you consider his or her resignation from the Local Assembly justified.

330.5 In this connection, we are instructed to point out that the House of Justice does not approve the automatic resignation of a member of a National Assembly from a Local Assembly, but rather asks that the circumstances of each case be considered separately. Normally those elected to a Local Assembly and the National Assembly should make every effort to serve on both bodies. The House of Justice has stated that

330.5a If it is too much of a burden and impractical for an individual member to assume the responsibilities of serving on both the National and the Local Assembly, he should present his case to both bodies, and seek consultation. Each case should be considered separately, depending on the circumstances of each member. It may be found that if a National Assembly member is an officer of the Local Spiritual Assembly, his resignation as officer of the Assembly, instead of the membership of that Assembly, may solve the problem for that individual.³³⁰⁻²

330.6 In the event that a solution cannot be found, however, membership on the National Spiritual Assembly would then take precedence over membership on the Local Assembly. The same principles would apply in the case of a believer who is elected to both a Regional Council and a Local Assembly. In such an instance, the Local Assembly would accept the resignation at its own discretion. Only if unusual circumstances arise would the case need to be referred to the National Assembly.

330.7 Another situation described in your email is one in which a member of a Regional Council is not able to participate in the meetings of the Council, either occasionally owing to professional obligations or for prolonged

330-2. LG, no. 173.

periods. In this connection, you ask what degree of flexibility the National Assembly has in replacing Council members. Here again, the principles are clear in the case of an elected body. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, we read the following in relation to membership on a Local Spiritual Assembly:

. . . It is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his Local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfill his responsibilities, as a representative of the community. Membership in a Local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Bahá'í activities, and ability to attend regularly the sessions of the Assembly.³³⁰⁻³ 330.7a

Further, we share with you the instructions below from the Guardian: 330.8

. . . it is establishing a dangerous precedent to allow Assemblies to put a time limit on non-attendance of their members at meetings of the S.A. [Spiritual Assembly], beyond which that person is automatically dropped from the Assembly and a vacancy declared. . . . There should be no time limit fixed by Assemblies beyond which a person is dropped. Every case of prolonged absence from the sessions of the Assembly should be considered separately by that Assembly, and if the person is seen to not want to attend meetings, or to be held away from them indefinitely because of illness or travel, then a vacancy could legitimately be declared and a new member be elected.³³⁰⁻⁴ 330.8a

Clearly, then, no hard and fast rules should be made as to the length of the period of absence of an elected member of a Regional Council from its meetings before a vacancy is declared, and each case would need to be decided on its own merit. This is not to say that a National Assembly may not bring to a Council's attention any problem it notes in the attendance of the members of a Council. Yet, as in the case of a Local Assembly, it is the Regional Council itself which should conclude that a vacancy should be 330.9

330-3. DG, no. 128.

330-4. DG, no. 16.

declared—this, presumably, after observing that the member in question does not attend meetings, despite repeated encouragement and attempts to remove possible impediments. However, unlike a Local Assembly which can declare a vacancy and call for a by-election at its own discretion, the Regional Council would need to refer the case to the National Assembly for final decision. In the event that a vacancy is declared, it would be filled as specified in item 2.2.5 of the 30 May 1997 statement, that is, “by the person who had the next highest number of votes on the ballot in the preceding election.”³³⁰⁻⁵

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

330-5. See no. 250, pp. 582–93.

2000–2001

The Twelve Month Plan

331

Ridván Message 2000

RIDVÁN 2000

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

331.1 We bow our heads in gratitude to the Lord of Hosts, our hearts brimming with joy, as we witness how marvelous a difference four years have made since the launching of the global Plan now concluded at this Festival of Splendors. So marked was the progress achieved during this period that our world community attained heights from which bright new horizons for its future exploits can clearly be discerned.

331.2 The quantitative difference resulted mainly from a more critical qualitative difference. The culture of the Bahá'í community experienced a change. This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community. That is so because the friends concerned themselves more consistently with deepening their knowledge of the divine Teachings and learned much—and this more systematically than before—about how to apply them to promulgating the Cause, to managing their individual and collective activities, and to working with their neighbors. In a word, they entered into a learning mode from which purposeful action was pursued. The chief propellant of this change was the system of training institutes established throughout the world with great rapidity—an accomplishment which, in the field of expansion and consolidation, qualifies as the single greatest legacy of the Four Year Plan.

331.3 In the increased capacity of individuals to teach the Faith, as shown in the thrust of individual initiatives; in the improved ability of Spiritual Assemblies, Councils and committees to guide the endeavors of the friends; in the introduction of new patterns of thought and action which influenced the collective behavior of the local community—in all such respects the system of training institutes demonstrated its indispensability as an engine of the process of entry by troops. By extending their operation through local study circles, many institutes magnified their capacity to cover wide regions with their programs. Mongolia, for instance, set up 106 study circles and, as a result, recorded a significant rise in the number of new believers. Con-

current with these kinds of developments, the members of our worldwide community also gave more attention to drawing on the power of prayer, to meditating on the sacred Word, and to deriving the spiritual benefits of participation in devotional gatherings. It is through the workings of these elements of an intensified individual and collective transformation that the size of the community is increasing. Although the number of new believers has as yet only slightly surpassed those of recent years, it is immensely gratifying to see that this increase is now geographically widespread, is engaging ever-larger segments of the community, and is successful in integrating new declarants into the life of the Cause.

So salutary, so promising a condition of the Faith also owes much, beyond measure, to the advisory influence, collaborative role and practical work of the Institution of the Counselors which were amplified with respect to the formation and operation of institutes—an amplification that reflected the timely stimulation imparted by a vibrant and ever alert International Teaching Center. 331.4

The central theme of the Four Year Plan—that of advancing the process of entry by troops—produced a high degree of integration of thought and action. It focused attention on a major stage of the evolution of the Bahá'í community that must be attained during the Formative Age; for until entry by troops is more widely sustained, the conditions will not be ripe for mass conversion, that breakthrough promised by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. The thematic focus of the Plan bore implications for all categories of Bahá'í activity; it called for a clarity of understanding which made possible systematic and strategic planning as a prerequisite of individual and collective action. The members of the community came gradually to appreciate how systematization would facilitate the processes of growth and development. This raising of consciousness was a huge step that led to an upgrading of teaching activities and a change in the culture of the community. 331.5

The integrative aspects of the theme were evident in the efforts at planning, building institutional capacity, and developing human resources. The threads connecting all these can be traced from the outset of the Plan to its very end. The December 1995 Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors in the Holy Land marked the beginning. There the Counselors were oriented to the features of the Plan. This was followed by their consultations with National Spiritual Assemblies in national planning sessions that moved subsequently to the regional level, involving Auxiliary Board members, Local Spiritual Assemblies and committees. Thus, at all levels, 331.6

elements of the Bahá'í administration became involved in the planning process, and reached beyond this stage to that of implementation, at which the institutional capacity to cope with entry by troops had to be created. Two major steps were taken in this regard: one was the establishment of training institutes; the other was the formal establishment and widespread introduction of Regional Bahá'í Councils as a feature of the administration between the local and national levels to strengthen the administrative capacity of certain communities where the growing complexity of the issues facing National Spiritual Assemblies required this development. Equally of relevance to integrating the essentials of the process were the strategies defined for the work in social and economic development, which is a critical part of consolidation, and in external affairs, which is a vital factor in enabling the Faith to manage the consequences of its emergence from obscurity. The combined effect produced resounding results, the enumeration of which would far exceed the compass of these pages. We are moved, however, to cite certain highlights that illustrate the scope of the Plan's achievements.

331.7 In the Holy Land, the construction of the Terraces and the buildings on the Arc forged ahead with every assurance of meeting the announced deadline for their completion at the end of this Gregorian year. Moreover, the building in Haifa to which we referred in our last *Riḍván* message in connection with the expanded size of pilgrimage groups is ready for use as of this *Riḍván*. In this same connection, architectural plans were approved for the much-needed facility to be built at Bahjí to accommodate pilgrims and other Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í visitors. The translation of the Texts for the expected new volume of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings has been completed and preparations are under way for its publication.

331.8 Strides in expansion and consolidation were manifest in ways other than those already mentioned: in pioneering, proclamation, the publication of literature, the use of the arts, the formation of Spiritual Assemblies, and advances of Bahá'í studies associations. Some 3,300 believers settled as long- and short-term international pioneers. That many countries usually on the receiving end had themselves dispatched pioneers abroad was a further indication of the maturation of national communities. True to the mandate addressed to their members, the Canadian and United States communities excelled in the number of pioneers that left their shores and in the much greater number of traveling teachers, including a significant representation of youth. Especially noteworthy, too, was the heartening response of believ-

ers of African descent in the United States to the call that Bahá'í teachers travel to Africa.

Proclamation of the Cause involved a variety of actions which included 331.9 the sponsoring of a wide range of occasions—anniversaries, commemorations, discussion groups, exhibits, and the like—that made it possible for large numbers of people to become acquainted with the teachings of the Faith. The Houses of Worship were magnetic centers for visitors who entered their doors in increasing numbers, especially in India, where some five million people were received during the last year. Added to such activities were the multiple uses of the media to get the Bahá'í message across. In the United States, some 60,000 inquirers responded to a media campaign designed by the National Teaching Committee. Worldwide, knowledge of the Faith was spread through the appearance, more frequently than before, of unsolicited, sympathetic articles in the print media. There was a similar broadening of exposure through readiness on the part of radio and television stations to include regular Bahá'í programs; this was so in such countries as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia. Such fortunate developments were crowned by the independent choice of international media establishments to use the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces as the site for the telecast of the Holy Land's segment of the worldwide media program celebrating the arrival of the year 2000.

The use of the arts became an important feature in the proclamation, 331.10 teaching, deepening and devotional activities of the worldwide community. The arts attracted young people, who applied them to their teaching and deepening activities principally through the numerous drama and dance workshops active in many parts of the world. But the dynamics of the arts went far beyond singing and dancing to involve a range of imaginative activities that grounded people in the Cause. Where folk art was used, particularly in Africa, the teaching work was greatly enhanced. For example, Ghana and Liberia each mounted a Light of Unity Project for promoting the arts in teaching. In India, the Communal Harmony Group had a similar purpose.

Mostly at the urging of the Counselors and with the support of the 331.11 Continental Fund, a boost was given to the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature especially in Africa and Asia. Moreover, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas appeared in a complete Arabic edition and in other languages.

While the restriction of the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies to 331.12 the first day of Ridván, which took effect in 1997, produced the anticipated

decrease in the number of these institutions, the fall was not drastic. The number has since held its ground and a sound process of consolidation is in place. Seven new pillars of the Universal House of Justice were raised up, bringing the total of National Spiritual Assemblies to 181.

331.13 Particularly gratifying has been the gathering momentum, during these four years, of Bahá'í scholarly activity, which forged ahead with the vital task of reinforcing the intellectual foundations of the Faith's work. Two invaluable results have been the impressive enrichment of Bahá'í literature and the production of a body of dissertations examining various contemporary problems in the light of Bahá'í principles. The network of Associations of Bahá'í Studies, celebrating this year its twenty-fifth anniversary, welcomed five new affiliates during the Plan. Reflective of the diversity and creativity that this field of service is attracting were the holding of Papua New Guinea's first Bahá'í studies conference and the Japanese Association's ground-breaking focus on the spiritual origins of traditional Japanese scholarship.

331.14 Progress in the field of social and economic development was decidedly qualitative, although figures showing an increase of projects were also impressive. Annually reported activities grew from some 1,600 at the beginning of the Plan to more than 1,900 nearing its end. The movement towards a more systematic approach remained the dominant characteristic of the work during this period. To promote consultation and action on the principles of social and economic development, the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Center sponsored 13 regional seminars in which an estimated 700 representatives from 60 countries participated. This Office also attended to the devising of pilot projects and materials suitable for the mounting of organized campaigns to foster youth empowerment and literacy, community health worker training, the advancement of women, and moral education. An example was the program in Guyana that trained more than 1,500 literacy facilitators; another was the completion in Malaysia of eight modules for the advancement of women, which became the basis for training sessions held in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A plan to integrate Bahá'í radio stations with the work of training institutes was initiated in the Guaymi region of Panama. As institutes have the potential to provide training for social and economic development, a movement in that direction involved a dozen institutes, which are currently experimenting with such efforts in areas including literacy, community health worker training, and vocational training. A number of Bahá'í-sponsored and

Bahá'í-inspired agencies have devoted their energies to projects, such as the one which involved collaboration with the World Health Organization in combating river blindness in Cameroon; more than 30,000 individuals have received the needed medication through this Bahá'í project. Another instance is the private university in Ethiopia, Unity College, whose student body has risen to 8,000. Another is Landegg Academy in Switzerland, which, while expanding and consolidating its academic program, extended highly appreciated assistance in the ongoing quest for a remedy to the horrendous social consequences of conflict in the Balkans. Yet another is Núr University in Bolivia, which, in a collaborative project with Ecuador, offered training to more than 1,000 school teachers in its moral leadership program. In this field of social and economic development, such evidences of capacity building were a great benefit to the purposes of the Plan.

Guided by the external affairs strategy communicated to National Spiritual Assemblies in 1994, the community's capacity in the fields of diplomatic and public information likewise expanded at an astonishing rate, placing the Bahá'í community in a dynamic relationship with the United Nations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media. The strategy focused activities at international and national levels on two key objectives: to influence the processes towards world peace, and to defend the Faith. Through the measures adopted for the defense of our dearly loved coreligionists in Iran, the Bahá'í International Community won a new measure of respect and support that created opportunities for other aims of the strategy to be pursued. To meet the challenge of the intractable situation in Iran, our institutions and external affairs agencies devised new approaches to activating available instruments of governments and the United Nations. The case of the persecutions in Iran occupied the attention of the highest authorities on the planet. Indeed, the news that an Iranian court had reaffirmed death sentences for two of the friends and imposed a similar sentence on a third evoked a sharp response from the President of the United States, who issued a clear admonition to Iran. As a consequence of the interventions of world leaders and the United Nations, the executions of Iranian Bahá'ís virtually stopped and the number of those sentenced to long-term imprisonment was drastically reduced.

While we have welcomed these interventions, we acclaim the self-sacrificing spirit, the fortitude, and the indomitable faith of our brothers and sisters in Iran that have invested such efforts with potency. These manifest qualities of the soul baffle their compatriots as to the stamina with which

they withstand the assaults so viciously and so relentlessly unloosed against them. How else could one explain that so few have been able to stand up to so many for so long? How else could they have aroused the active concern of the world when even a single one of them faces the threat of death? Iran's tragedy is that the assailants have until now failed to see that the divine principles for which these persecuted ones have sacrificed their possessions and even their lives contain the very solutions that would satisfy the yearnings of a population in its hour of discontent. But there can be no doubt whatever that the systematic tyranny to which our Iranian friends have so cruelly been subjected will ultimately yield to the Almighty Power guiding the mysterious proceedings toward their assured destiny in all its promised glory.

331.17 With regard to the other objective of the external affairs strategy, the lines of action were guided by four themes—human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. Our records show a huge step forward in the work on human rights and the status of women. With regard to the former, the United Nations Office prosecuted a creative program of human rights education which has, so far, served as a means of building the capacity of no fewer than 99 National Spiritual Assemblies for diplomatic work. Regarding the status of women, the existence of 52 national offices for the advancement of women, the contributions of numerous Bahá'í women and men to conferences and workshops at all levels, the selection of Bahá'í representatives to crucial positions on key NGO committees, including the one that serves the United Nations Development Fund for Women, show how the followers of Bahá'u'lláh assiduously promote His principle of the equality of women and men.

331.18 At the same time an array of initiatives are disseminating information about the Bahá'í Faith to various publics. These include such innovative undertakings as: the launching of "The Bahá'í World" Web site, which is already averaging 25,000 visits a month; the issuing of a statement entitled *Who is Writing the Future?*, which is helping the friends everywhere talk about contemporary issues; the airing since last November on the World Wide Web of "Payam-e-Doost," the Persian-language radio program broadcast for an hour weekly in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area—a program which is available at all times throughout the world on the Internet; and the implementation of a highly original television program, applying moral principles to day-to-day problems, which has won the warm endorsement of government authorities in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria,

Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

A phenomenon that has gathered force as the century draws to its end is that the people of the world have arisen to express their aspirations through what has come to be known as the “organizations of civil society.” It must be a source of great satisfaction to Bahá’ís everywhere that the Bahá’í International Community as an NGO representing a cross-section of humankind has won such trust as a unifying agent in major discussions shaping the future of humankind. Our principal representative at the United Nations was appointed to cochair a committee of non-governmental organizations—a position that is giving the Bahá’í International Community a leading role in the organization of the Millennium Forum. This gathering, called by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and scheduled to be held in May, will give organizations of civil society an opportunity to formulate views and recommendations on global issues which will be taken up at the subsequent Millennium Summit in September of this year to be attended by heads of state and government. 331.19

Humanity’s awakening to the spiritual dimensions of the changes occurring in the world has a special significance for Bahá’ís. The interfaith dialogue has intensified. During the Four Year Plan it increasingly involved the Faith as a recognized participant. The Parliament of the World’s Religions held in Cape Town last December brought together some 6,000 attendees, among whom was a strong Bahá’í delegation. Bahá’ís served on both the South African and International Boards of Directors that planned the event. For Bahá’ís, interest in the occasion arose particularly from the fact that the first mention of the Name of Bahá’u’lláh at a public gathering in the West had occurred at the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893. Two inter-religious events held in Jordan last November included Bahá’ís as invited participants: a conference on conflict and religion in the Middle East, and the annual meeting of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. Bahá’í representatives attended events in Vatican City and New Delhi sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church; on the latter occasion, in the presence of Pope John Paul II, Counselor Zena Sorabjee was one of the representatives of religions addressing the gathering. In the United Kingdom, the Faith was placed in the public arena when Bahá’í representatives joined members of eight other major religions for an interfaith celebration of the new millennium in the Royal Gallery of Westminster Palace, where, in the presence 331.20

of Royalty, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other distinguished persons, reference was made to the gathering of the “nine major religions of the United Kingdom.” In Germany, for the first time Bahá’ís were included in an interfaith dialogue. This reversed a longstanding attitude of Christian denominations which had avoided contact with the Faith owing to a book written by a Covenant-breaker and issued by a Lutheran publishing house in 1981. The remedy was provided in a 600-page scholarly rebuttal written by three Bahá’ís and published in 1995 by a leading non-Bahá’í firm, representing a signal victory for the German Bahá’í community. An English translation was published in the last year of the Plan. Interfaith dialogue took an unusual form when at Lambeth Palace in 1998 representatives of the World Bank and of nine major religions held a meeting which led to the formation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. The announced aim of the Dialogue is to try to bridge the gap between the faith communities and the World Bank in order to enable them to work together more effectively to overcome world poverty. The frequency and wide embrace of interfaith gatherings represent a new phenomenon in the relations among the religions. It is apparent that the various religious communities are striving to achieve the spirit of friendliness and fellowship among themselves that Bahá’u’lláh urged His followers to show towards the followers of other religions.

^{331.21} The concentrated endeavor of the Bahá’í community in these four years occurred at a time when the wider society grappled with a torrent of conflicting interests. In this brief but intensely dynamic span, the forces at work in the Bahá’í community and throughout the world proceeded with relentless acceleration. In their wake were revealed more conspicuously than before the social phenomena to which Shoghi Effendi alluded. More than six decades ago, he had called attention to the “simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other.” These twin processes did not continue in isolation from those specific to the Bahá’í community but at times proceeded in such a way as to invite, as has already been shown, the direct involvement of the Faith. They seemed to run at opposite sides of the same corridor of time. On one side, wars fomented by religious, political, racial or tribal conflict raged in some 40 places; sudden, total breakdown of civil order paralyzed a number of countries; terrorism as a political weapon became epidemic; a surge of international criminal networks raised alarm. Yet on the opposite side, attempts at implementing and

elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá'u'lláh's prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for an international criminal court to be established, another action that accords with Bahá'í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders are scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of communications have opened the way for everyone to communicate with anyone on the planet. The economic disintegration in Asia threatened to destabilize the world economy, but it prompted efforts both to remedy the immediate situation and to find ways of bringing a sense of equity to international trade and finance. These are but a few examples of the two contrasting but interactive tendencies operating at this time, confirming Shoghi Effendi's inspired summation of the forces at work in God's greater plan, "whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

At the conclusion of these four eventful years, we have arrived at a portentous convergence of ends and beginnings in measures of Gregorian time and the Bahá'í era. In one instance, this convergence entails the wrapping up of the twentieth century and, in the other, opens a new stage in the unfolding of the Formative Age. The perspective from these two frames of time prompts us to reflect on a vision of world-shaping trends that have synchronized, and to do so in the context of the insight so graphically projected by Shoghi Effendi at the inception of the Arc he conceived. During the course of the Plan, this vision assumed a brilliant clarity as the construction projects advanced on Mount Carmel, as world leaders took bold steps towards fashioning the structures of a global political peace, and as local and national Bahá'í institutions moved to new levels in their evolution. We carry with us a sacred and enduring memory of the twentieth century that stirs our energies even as it sets our path: It is of that seminal moment in the history of humankind when the Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, during an unparalleled ministry, designed the architecture of a new World Order and when, subsequently during some of the most devastating years, the Guardian of the Faith devoted his utmost energies to raising up the structures of an Administrative System that, at the end of the century, stands before the gaze of the world in the wholeness of its essential form. We come thus to a bridge between times. The capacities developed through a century of struggle and sacrifice by a handful of intoxicated lovers of Bahá'u'lláh must now be applied to the inescapable tasks remaining to the

331.22

Formative Age, whose many epochs of unremitting labor will lead to that Golden Age of our Faith when the Most Great Peace will envelop the earth.

331.23 We begin at this Riḍván with a Twelve Month Plan. Brief though it is, it must and will suffice to accomplish certain vital tasks and to lay the ground for the next twenty-year thrust of the Master's Divine Plan. What was so carefully begun four years ago—the systematic acquisition of knowledge, qualities and skills of service—must be augmented. Wherever they exist, national and regional institutes must activate to the full the programs and systems they have adopted. New institutes must be formed where such needs have been identified. Greater steps must be taken to systematize the teaching work undertaken through individual initiative and institutional sponsorship. It is partly for this purpose that in several areas of each continent the Counselors and the National Assemblies have established "Area Growth Programs." The results will provide a body of experience for the benefit of future Plans. The individual, the institutions and the local community are urged to focus their attention on these essential tasks, so as to be fully prepared for the five-year enterprise to begin at Riḍván 2001—an enterprise that will take the Bahá'í world to the next phase in the advancement of the process of entry by troops.

331.24 But beyond giving attention to these tasks, there is a pressing challenge to be faced: Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially. Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere. The social dislocation of children in our time is a sure mark of a society in decline; this condition is not, however, confined to any race, class, nation or economic condition—it cuts across them all. It grieves our hearts to realize that in so many parts of the world children are employed as soldiers, exploited as laborers, sold into virtual slavery, forced into prostitution, made the objects of pornography, abandoned by parents centered on their own desires, and subjected to other forms of victimization too numerous to mention. Many such horrors are inflicted by the parents themselves upon their own children. The spiritual and psychological damage defies estimation. Our worldwide community cannot

escape the consequences of these conditions. This realization should spur us all to urgent and sustained effort in the interests of children and the future.

Even though children's activities have been a part of past Plans, these have fallen short of the need. Spiritual education of children and junior youth is of paramount importance to the further progress of the community. It is therefore imperative that this deficiency be remedied. Institutes must be certain to include in their programs the training of teachers of children's classes, who can make their services available to local communities. But although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community as a whole, to show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that of a rapidly declining order. 331.25

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behavior toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances. 331.26

Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth. The employment of the arts in various forms can be of great value in such activity. 331.27

331.28 And now we wish to address a few words to parents, who bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children. Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them. Still others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The beloved Master has said that “it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son,” adding that, “should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.” Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mold their children’s moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá’í children’s classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá’í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

331.29 Our expectations are alive with the thought that the Continental Counselors will gather in the Holy Land in January 2001 on an occasion that will celebrate the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on the Hill of God. Auxiliary Board members from throughout the world will participate with them in what will undoubtedly turn out to be one of the historic happenings of the Formative Age. The coming together of such a constellation of Bahá’í officers must by its very nature produce untold benefits for a community which will again be close to ending one Plan and embarking on another. As we contemplate the implications, we

turn our hearts in gratitude to the very dear Hands of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí Muḥammad Varqá, who by their residence in the Holy Land hold aloft the torch of service which the beloved Guardian lit in their hearts.

With this Twelve Month Plan, we cross a bridge to which we shall never return. We launch this Plan in the earthly absence of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. She remained with us to the virtual end of the twentieth century as a beam of the light that had shone during that incomparable period in the history of the human race. In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Master lamented His inability to travel throughout the world to raise the Divine call, and in the intensity of His disappointment He penned the hope: “Please God, ye may achieve it.” Amatu'l-Bahá responded with boundless energy, touching far-flung spots of the earth in the 185 countries that were privileged to receive her inimitable gifts. Her example, which will retain forever its splendor, illumines the hearts of thousands upon thousands throughout the planet. Against the inadequacy of any other gesture, might we all not dedicate our humble efforts during this Plan to the memory of one for whom teaching was the primary purpose, the perfect joy of life? 331.30

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

332

Restoration of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia

RIDVÁN 157

To the Bahá'ís of Indonesia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With the greatest of happiness we extend our loving greetings to you on the long-awaited occasion of the restoration of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia after a lapse of almost three decades. 332.1

Your Bahá'í community owes its origin to the arrival in Batavia over a century ago of Jamal Effendi and Mustafa Rumi and their subsequent travel to many parts of the region. It entered a period of accelerated growth during the Ten Year Crusade, aided by an influx of dedicated pioneers from other lands, including the Hand of the Cause Rahmatu'llah Muhajir, but 332.2

its progress was arrested by the enforced dissolution of the elected Bahá'í institutions.

332.3 Although deprived of their institutions, members of your community held fast to the Cause of God in the face of misunderstanding and hostility in some quarters. We are moved to express our admiration and gratitude for the heroism and tenacity manifested during the years of adversity. Who can doubt that it was this fidelity and steadfastness which attracted the limitless blessings of Bahá'u'lláh through which the barriers to your progress have been removed? Our profound gratitude is offered also to the dear friends who guided your activities with consummate wisdom during the years of deprivation, most recently as members of the Bahá'í Committee for Indonesia, and whose endeavors were powerfully reinforced by the Continental Counselors and their helpers.

332.4 An exciting new chapter now commences, in the annals of the Faith in Indonesia, leading it forward inexorably to that blessed time when the Faith can be openly proclaimed and multitudes will find spiritual fulfillment by entering the sanctuary of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. However, at this time, it is most important that the believers throughout Indonesia continue to avoid actions which could attract attention from unfriendly elements and could even lead to calls for the reimposition of the restrictions from which you so recently emerged. Through turning to your National Assembly, cooperating fully with it, and offering it your wholehearted obedience, your community will be able to develop along sound lines.

332.5 The continued striving to effect the spiritual transformation prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh; the persistent endeavor to acquire a deeper understanding of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh; the conducting of regular classes for Bahá'í children; the encouragement and orientation of youth; the strengthening of your training institutes; teaching the Faith with discretion and restraint; the consolidation and multiplication of your Local Spiritual Assemblies—these must rank among the major duties to which you are summoned at this auspicious time, as your national community takes its rightful place with its sister communities throughout the world embarking on the One Year Plan.

332.6 Be assured of our ardent prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines, that the divine confirmations may continually be showered upon you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

333

International Financial Collaboration Goals

3 MAY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

At the outset of the Four Year Plan, forty-one selected National Spiritual Assemblies were advised of the new approach the Universal House of Justice had decided to take in the assignment of international financial collaboration goals during the Plan. Each of these Assemblies was asked to gauge how much it could contribute towards the acquisition and improvement of property and equipment by other national communities over the following four years. They were informed that, on the basis of their own estimates, the House of Justice would call upon them to assist communities in other parts of the world as specific needs came to its attention. 333.1

This approach has proved to be highly effective, allowing needs and resources to be readily matched and goals to be completed expeditiously. In all, approximately US\$2,000,000 was pledged by those National Assemblies that responded to the call of the House of Justice to participate in this initiative, and a total of some US\$1,300,000 has been allocated for capital expenditures in national communities in various parts of the Bahá'í world. Given the success of the initiative, the House of Justice has decided to carry it forward into the Twelve Month Plan and will assign goals bearing in mind the unused portion of the pledges made by the National Assemblies concerned. 333.2

The Universal House of Justice has requested us to express to you its warm gratitude for your participation in this important enterprise. 333.3

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

334

Release of Bahá'í Prisoner in Iran

10 MAY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

334.1 We are pleased to be able to inform you that the Universal House of Justice has just been notified by the Friends in Iran that Mr. Manúchíhr Khulúsí, who had been held in Mashhad under sentence of death, has been released. It is not clear what gave rise to his release nor the status of the verdict against him.

334.2 At the time of his arrest on 9 June 1999, Mr. Khulúsí was visiting Bírjand for a meeting with the responsible Friends of that town. About six days later he was moved to a prison in Mashhad, where he was held in solitary confinement for some time, and his interrogation involved beating. The charges brought against Mr. Khulúsí are not known, but it is clear that they related to his being a Bahá'í. His trial took place in Branch 3 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mashhad on 7 and 8 September 1999, and the death sentence was announced on 3 February 2000. Mr. Khulúsí was not permitted to meet with his lawyer, and his attempts to submit an appeal against the verdict within the 20-day period allowed were denied. His wife succeeded in submitting a statement to Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Courts, and sent a copy by post to Branch 3 of the Supreme Court.

334.3 The House of Justice is delighted at Mr. Khulúsí's release, and prays that it will presage similar treatment for the eleven other dear friends known to be unjustly held in Iranian prisons by reason of their Faith, and particularly for the five under sentence of death. . . .

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

335

Clarification on the Role of the Regional Bahá'í Councils

16 MAY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South Africa

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email . . . in which you 335.1
pose a number of questions related to Regional Bahá'í Councils. . . .

In reference to your first question, the establishment of administrative 335.2
committees where Local Spiritual Assemblies are not yet functioning constitutes an important step in the development of local Bahá'í communities. Appointing such committees is a function of the National Spiritual Assembly; however, it can certainly delegate this task to the Regional Councils, if it so wishes.

Your second question is whether or not a Regional Bahá'í Council can 335.3
accept or dissolve a Local Spiritual Assembly in its area of jurisdiction. Although the prerogative of recognition of Local Spiritual Assemblies rests with the National Spiritual Assembly, procedures for accepting Local Assemblies are determined at the discretion of the National Assembly. The question of dissolving Local Assemblies is another matter; it should not be delegated by the National Assembly to the Regional Councils at this time. The Councils can, of course, make recommendations to the National Assembly in this respect.

As to your final query, you quote a passage concerning the need for newly 335.4
enrolled believers to understand that there is an administration in the Faith which must be obeyed and ask whether this applies to Regional Councils. Clearly for a Regional Council to carry out the range of responsibilities with which it has been entrusted, it has to have the complete support of the friends, and its decisions should carry due weight. Each of these decisions is made within the context of one of the functions delegated by the National Assembly to the Regional Council. The response of the friends will be commensurate with the nature of that function.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

336

Release of Publication on Obligatory Prayer and Fasting

22 MAY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{336.1} We are pleased to send you the enclosed copies of a new publication of Bahá'í Writings entitled *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*. This work has been prepared for the Bahá'í world by the Research Department at the request of the Universal House of Justice in connection with the recent application of additional laws related to the devotional life announced by the House of Justice in its message of 28 December 1999.³³⁶⁻¹ It contains authorized versions prepared at the Bahá'í World Center of forty-eight newly translated extracts from Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá as well as six previously untranslated prayers by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast.

^{336.2} You are welcome to share its contents with the believers in whatever manner you deem appropriate. The enclosed copies of the release edition are intended as samples. Additional copies will not be made available from the World Center, although electronic copies of the text can be forwarded to you upon request. No doubt in time, through your own publishing arrangements, printed editions will become available in many languages.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

337

The Bahá'í Administrative Order

18 JULY 2000

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

^{337.1} The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 31 May 2000 and has asked us to send you the following reply.

336-1. See no. 315, pp. 697-99.

To your question “What do I have to think of the promotion of a Bahá’í democratization?” there is both a simple reply and a more complex one, and the House of Justice feels that it is desirable to approach the matter from both points of view. 337.2

Firstly, as a Bahá’í who has given many decades of outstanding service in your community, you understand that the Bahá’í Administrative Order is an integral part of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh; it is a divinely conceived system which, as the Guardian explained in *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, “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.”³³⁷⁻¹ 337.3

It is the continuing task of Bahá’ís to increase their understanding of the principles on which the Administrative Order is founded, and to improve the faithfulness with which they implement these principles in their actions. 337.4 Indeed one of the specific needs of this period in the development of the Faith is the evolution of national and local Bahá’í institutions. If, therefore, by “the promotion of a Bahá’í democratization” is meant the furthering of an increasingly responsible participation in the work of the community by its individual members, this is highly meritorious, and should be a continual endeavor of Bahá’í institutions.

That is the simple answer. However, if the intention is that the Bahá’í Administrative Order should be altered to more closely accord with current concepts of political democracy, a more complex series of issues arises. In *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Shoghi Effendi lists evidences “of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs,”³³⁷⁻² but this does not justify a proposal to change the system which has been established in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and in the elucidations of Shoghi Effendi. Such an effort, whether or not described as “the promotion 337.5

337-1. WOB, pp. 152–53.

337-2. WOB, p. 154.

of a Bahá'í democratization," would be contrary to the clear teachings of the Faith. Consideration of the various specific questions included in your letter will help to clarify this distinction.

337.6 In the second paragraph of your letter you say that you understand that the Bahá'í World Order is "at least 80%, a theocratic-aristocratic order." Inasmuch as the Order of Bahá'u'lláh is an integral part of the divine Revelation that He, as a Manifestation of God, has given us, one could say that this Order is essentially theocratic, but inasmuch as it is entirely devoid of any kind of clergy or priesthood, it is not at all a "theocracy" in the sense in which the term is generally used and understood.

337.7 Similarly, the quality of aristocracy (rule by the best) as it appears in the Faith is in sharp contrast to what is generally understood by this term. Free from electioneering or such external pressures as those coming from economic power or manipulation of the press, the believers seek to elect for membership on their governing institutions those persons whom they regard as best qualified for such office. The elected members are then responsible to God and to their consciences, rather than to those who elect them. You are undoubtedly familiar with Shoghi Effendi's words in *Bahá'í Administration* on the attitude and responsibility of members of Assemblies:

337.7a 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 serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and

passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And, 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 whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.³³⁷⁻³

As already noted above, the way in which believers become members 337.8
of the elected institutions is democratic. It is, indeed, far more democratic than the methods by which the members of most parliaments are elected. The Bahá'í electoral system is entirely free from the power and bargaining of parties and factions, and from the manipulations of vested interests. Each voter is free to cast his or her ballot for whomever he or she chooses.

Even in the best democracies nowadays the driving incentive in elections 337.9
is the wish of each politician to obtain power so as to be able to carry out the program that he particularly favors—an election becomes a competition which the self-promoting candidates either “win” or “lose.” The electorate is treated as a mass to be swayed, by rhetoric and various forms of inducement, to support one or other candidate. In the Bahá'í system, however, the voters are the active force and the motive which impels them is to choose those individuals who are best suited to serve on the institution. The persons elected are passive in the electoral process (except in their role as voters) and accept election as an obligation to serve the community in response to the wish of the electorate. In other words, the systems differ in their essential spirit: one is a seeking for power, the other is an acceptance of responsibility for service.

You mention several things which you describe as the most significant 337.10
democratic principles and values. Among them are transparency, accountability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue. Here too, just as the

337-3. BA, p. 64.

spirit underlying the Bahá'í system differs from that impelling most current democratic systems, so do the methods of implementing these principles and the attitude of those involved.

337.11 In general one can say that modern democracies have been established as the outcome of attempts to limit the power of absolute monarchy, of dictatorships, or of certain dominant classes. This may have come about gradually through the centuries, or tumultuously by a series of revolutions. Thus, even when democratic constitutions and structures have been established, there remains a suspicion of authority as such, and a tension between the degree of freedom accorded to individual citizens and the imposition of sufficient public discipline to protect the weak against the selfish pursuits of the strong among the citizenry. The operation of transparency, accountability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue is thus imbued with a spirit of partisanship that easily descends into the merciless invasion of personal privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests. The reaction of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and reciprocal misuse of the media—in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in the social fabric.

337.12 In contrast to these patterns bred by traditional antagonisms, the Bahá'í system is based upon the ideals of unity, harmony, justice, diversity and forbearance in the building of a divinely conceived administrative structure through a process of mutual learning and discovery. As already noted, the element of power-seeking is entirely absent. All members of a Bahá'í community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and principles of the Faith. As part of this process, the Assemblies are encouraged to continually share their hopes and cares and the news of developments with the members of the community and to seek their views and support. There are, of course, matters such as the personal problems of a believer which he (or she) brings to his Assembly for advice, the amounts of the contributions of individual believers to the Fund, and so forth, in relation to which the Assembly must observe strict confidentiality. As in any just system of government the proper balance has to be sought and found between extremes. In this connection, you will recall Shoghi Effendi's statement in *Bahá'í Administration*:

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.³³⁷⁻⁴ 337.12a

Wherever one finds malfunctioning in a Bahá'í community, it can be traced to a failure to follow properly the laws, principles and methods laid down in the Writings. The overcoming of such shortcomings is part of the learning process in which all Bahá'ís are involved. The continual aim of the institutions of the Bahá'í community—whether it be through the operation of summer schools and training institutes, through the development of the Nineteen Day Feasts and National Conventions, or through day-to-day interaction among the friends—is to empower the individual believers so that they will learn how to live their lives with increasing knowledge, wisdom, unity and fruitfulness in conformity with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. 337.13

Further, in addition to the Spiritual Assemblies, the Bahá'í Administrative Order also contains the institutions of the Continental Boards of Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards. Their endeavors, with the individuals, the community and the institutions, are intended to help maintain the true spirit of the Faith, to counsel the governing institutions and to assist them to attain the high ideals set before them by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. As the House of Justice wrote in a letter dated 24 April 1972: “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.”³³⁷⁻⁵ The House of Justice went on to comment that, 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 these two arms of the adminis- 337.14

337-4. BA, pp. 63–64.

337-5. MUHJ, no. 111.14.

tration be properly understood and the value of their interaction be fully recognized.

337.15 Two other issues raised by you also deserve attention. Direct election of the main institutions of a society can hardly be regarded as a significant democratic principle. In the United States of America, for example, the president is elected by an electoral college of individuals chosen in state elections. In some other countries the president is elected by the parliament, not by the people. However, whether direct election is a democratic principle or not, it cannot be applied in the Bahá'í Faith because it is stated in the Sacred Writings that the Universal House of Justice must be elected in a three-stage election and National Spiritual Assemblies must be the outcome of a two-stage election.

337.16 Finally, there is the question of the membership of the Universal House of Justice being restricted to men. This, likewise, is a provision of the Sacred Writings, as stated clearly by both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. It should be viewed in the light of the principle mentioned above, that election to institutions of Bahá'í administration is regarded as a summons to service and not as an accession to power. It is also significant that the Universal House of Justice has itself written that the fact that its membership is restricted to men cannot be used as an indication that men excel women or that the Bahá'í principle of the equality of the sexes is not valid. As you know, it is a mandate of the Universal House of Justice to ensure the establishment of the equality of men and women, and you are undoubtedly aware of the vigor with which the Bahá'ís are putting this into effect. This matter was discussed at some length in a letter written on 31 May 1988 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, a copy of which is enclosed for your information.

337.17 The House of Justice hopes that these comments will help you to resolve the confusion which you indicate is troubling you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

338

Message to the International Bahá'í Youth Conference in Karachi, Pakistan

20 JULY 2000

To the Friends gathered at the Asian International Youth Conference, Karachi, Pakistan, 21–23 July 2000

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We send our loving greetings to the friends gathered at the International Bahá'í Youth Conference held in Karachi at this central stage of the Twelve Month Plan. 338.1

Our confident hope is that the youth, both in Pakistan and throughout Asia, will increasingly be one of the strongest instruments in advancing the process of entry by troops. For this to happen, Bahá'í youth, like all Bahá'ís, need to fortify their faith by immersing themselves repeatedly and frequently in the study of the Creative Word of God. One of the major purposes of training institutes is to help make this enrichment possible. Our hope is that great numbers of youth will not only participate in the courses of the institutes, but will themselves assume the responsibilities of tutors and facilitators. Such a development will serve both Bahá'ís and the wider society in your countries. 338.2

Now that the knowledge of the name of the Faith has spread widely, and ever more people are becoming aware of its Teachings, the public in many places is watching the Bahá'í community to see how these life-giving principles of Bahá'u'lláh are affecting the daily lives of His followers. The verities of the Faith must become increasingly demonstrated in the way its adherents serve humanity, champion justice and promote unity. In a letter written to a National Spiritual Assembly on his behalf shortly before his passing the beloved Guardian explained: 338.3

The Bahá'ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of their nation. In direct ratio to their success will be the protection vouchsafed, not only to them but to their country. These are the immutable laws of God, from which there is no escape. . . . 338.3a

338-1. LG, no. 454.

338.4 The challenge facing you at this important gathering is to consider how you can become this leaven, an example to masses of people who are desperately seeking somewhere to turn for spiritual help.

338.5 As you are aware, the Twelve Month Plan emphasizes the importance of the Bahá'í education of children and junior youth. Youth, who are so often the role models of their younger siblings and friends, have a unique opportunity in this regard. In responding to this opportunity, you will be astonished how you yourselves will be enriched.

338.6 As you consult together over the next few days, drawing upon the wisdom and experience of Counselors Vicente Samaniego and Rosalie Tran, you may be sure that our prayers will be surrounding you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

339

Message to the Youth Conference in Vancouver, Canada

20 JULY 2000

To the Friends Gathered at the Youth Conference in Vancouver,
20–24 July 2000

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

339.1 You come together at a time of immense promise for the national community to which you belong. It would be difficult to exaggerate the strengths that the Cause in Canada has developed, at the threshold of a new century. The level of unity that has been achieved, the energy and competence being displayed by your Regional Councils, the financial sacrifices that the Canadian believers are so wholeheartedly making to support the work of the Cause internationally, the trust and respect that the community's collective efforts have won from governmental and non-governmental institutions alike, its extraordinary record of service in both the teaching and pioneering fields overseas, and most recently the dramatic mobilization of human resources across your vast country through the Canadian believers' embrace of the institute program being promoted by your National Assembly—such a brilliant demonstration of spiritual power must excite the admiration of any fair-minded observer.

In all of these great advances, Canadian Bahá'í youth have taken an increasingly vital role. In doing so you have developed capacities that distinguish you in Canadian society, however progressive, however highly trained, however materially well-endowed various segments of that society may be. You need to ask yourselves how these impressive capacities can best be used. 339.2

One evening, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland Maxwell in Montreal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá summed up in a few intensely poignant words both the crisis He saw engulfing humankind and the sole means of deliverance: 339.3

Today the world of humanity is walking in darkness because it is out of touch with the world of God. That is why we do not see the signs of God in the hearts of men. . . . When a divine spiritual illumination becomes manifest in the world of humanity, when divine instruction and guidance appear, then enlightenment follows, a new spirit is realized within, a new power descends, and a new life is given. It is like the birth from the animal kingdom into the kingdom of man. When man acquires these virtues, the oneness of the world of humanity will be revealed. . . . Then will the justice of God become manifest, all humanity will appear as the members of one family, and every member of that family will be consecrated to cooperation and mutual assistance.³³⁹⁻¹ 339.3a

It is to this divine illumination that you have turned your hearts. It is the force of this spiritual enlightenment—sharply focused in the institute process—that is opening your minds even wider to the possibilities of the Cause of God. And it is not surprising that, for those who are exposed to such influences, the experience does indeed seem like the birth from an old condition to an entirely new one. 339.4

With hearts filled with admiration for all that your community is accomplishing and with the brightest hopes for the contributions that you as youth will particularly bring to the great adventure ahead, we urge you to make a wholehearted commitment to this vision of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Like the rest of the world, Canadian society stands in urgent need of moral transformation. Such transformation, as amply evidenced by decades of conten- 339.5

339-1. PUP, p. 424.

tious history, cannot be achieved through political passion, the conflict of vested interests, or technical recipes. What is called for is a spiritual revival, as a prerequisite to the successful application of political, economic and technological instruments. But there is a need for a catalyst. Be assured that, in spite of your small numbers, you are the channels through which such a catalyst can be provided.

339.6 Be not dismayed if your endeavors are dismissed as utopian by the voices that would oppose any suggestion of fundamental change. Trust in the capacity of this generation to disentangle itself from the embroilments of a divided world. To discharge your responsibilities, you will have to show forth courage, the courage of those who cling to standards of rectitude, who champion the cause of justice, whose lives are characterized by purity of thought and action, and whose purpose is directed by love and indomitable faith.

339.7 As one of the coexecutors of the Divine Plan, your community's mandate is not, of course, limited to Canada. It is worldwide, and this global perspective must frame both your deliberations and your endeavors. Be confident that, as you turn your hearts and minds to the challenge facing you, you will be surrounded by our ardent prayers at the Holy Threshold that Bahá'ú'lláh will empower you to realize your highest aspirations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

340

Commemorative Events for World Peace

15 AUGUST 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

340.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to call to your attention the convening of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders that is to be held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 28–31 August 2000. At the invitation of the organizers, the Faith will be represented by Mr. Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community.

340.2 A call has been made for religious communities throughout the world to join in a Day of Prayer for World Peace on 28 August, the opening day of

the Summit. Although this information has just in the last few days reached the Bahá'í World Center, the Universal House of Justice feels that it merits a positive response on the part of the Bahá'í community. We have therefore been asked to suggest that you take whatever action is possible under the circumstances. The response of the friends might well include their joining with members of other religions in the spirit of interfaith cooperation.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

341

Update on Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran

18 AUGUST 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

The following news has just been received from the Friends in Iran.

341.1

1. Prisoners under sentence of death in Mashhad. The Supreme Court, having examined the cases of Mr. Sirus Dhabihí Muqaddam and Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, has ruled that the verdicts against them are unsound, and has referred them to another court. The families of the prisoners are reported to have noticed a great change in the attitude of the authorities towards both themselves and the Bahá'í prisoners, and hopes are high that their cases may be dismissed. It is not known whether this information also applies to Mr. Ata'ullah Hamid Nasirzadieh, who is serving a ten-year prison sentence, having been arrested with the other two friends in November 1997.

341.2

2. Restoration of properties. Six believers, understood to be among those briefly detained during the raids on BIHE personnel in the fall of 1998, had to surrender the title deeds of their properties for possible confiscation. They are the only Bahá'ís known to have been treated in this way at the time. The Iranian courts found no evidence to support the accusations that were brought against these friends—espionage and working against the Islamic Republic—and have offered their confiscated properties back to them, ordering that the deeds be returned to their owners, as the charges against them had not been substantiated. . . .

341.3

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

342

International Millennial Gatherings Concerning Global Issues

24 SEPTEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{342.1} In its Riḍván 2000 message, the Universal House of Justice pointed with keen anticipation to the occurrence this year of millennial gatherings concerned with global issues needing urgent solutions, and with how the United Nations is to address them. During the first week of this month, the United Nations Millennium Summit, the last and most significant of three related events, convened in New York with the participation of the largest number of heads of state and of government ever to be assembled. In view of the historic importance of this and the two earlier occasions, and considering the prominent involvement of representatives of the Bahá'í International Community in all three, the House of Justice has directed us to convey the following.

^{342.2} In calling for a gathering of world leaders at the 2000 session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations also suggested the merit of their inviting the views and recommendations of organizations of civil society; this gave birth to the idea of a Millennium Forum. Another thought that won the warm support of the Secretary-General was that a meeting of religious and spiritual leaders devoted to peace would enhance the work of the United Nations.

^{342.3} Thus, the Millennium Forum, the first of these major gatherings, brought together on 22–26 May more than 1,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations from more than 100 countries “to consult about the role of the United Nations in confronting the great global challenges facing humanity in the 21st Century.” They focused their consultations on the following specific topics: 1) peace, security and disarmament; 2) eradication of poverty, including debt cancellation and social development; 3) human rights; 4) sustainable development and environment; 5) facing the challenges of globalization: achieving equity, justice and diversity; and 6) strengthening and democratizing the United Nations and international organizations.

As a result, the participants in the Millennium Forum adopted a declaration, for presentation to world leaders at the subsequent Millennium Summit, in which they set forth their vision and made their recommendations for revitalizing the United Nations. “In our vision,” these representatives of civil society declared, “we are one human family, in all our diversity, living on one common homeland and sharing a just, sustainable and peaceful world, guided by universal principles of democracy, equality, inclusion, voluntarism, non-discrimination and participation by all persons. . . . It is a world where peace and human security, as envisioned in the principles of the United Nations Charter, replace armaments, violent conflict and wars. It is a world where everyone lives in a clean environment with a fair distribution of the earth’s resources. Our vision includes a special role for the dynamism of young people and the experience of the elderly and reaffirms the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights—civil, political, economic, social and cultural.” 342.4

The Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which was held on 28–31 August and involved more than 1,000 attendees, constituted the second of these gatherings. The “very specific purpose” of this meeting of religious leaders was, as stated in the introductory statement of the program, “to further the prospects for peace among peoples and nations, and within every individual.” The outcome of this Peace Summit was the adoption and signing of a declaration committing the participants to global peace. Noting that “the United Nations and the religions of the world have a common concern for human dignity, justice and peace,” accepting that “men and women are equal partners in all aspects of life and children are the hope of the future,” and acknowledging that “religions have contributed to the peace of the world but have also been used to create division and fuel hostilities,” the declaration resolved to “collaborate with the United Nations and all men and women of goodwill locally, regionally and globally in the pursuit of peace in all its dimensions.” 342.5

As you were previously informed in our letter of 15 August 2000, the Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community, Mr. Albert Lincoln, represented the Faith on this occasion. He was listed among the “Pre-eminent World Religious and Spiritual Leaders” in attendance and was afforded the opportunity both to offer a Bahá’í prayer during the opening ceremony and to speak during the third plenary session held in the General Assembly Hall on the second day of the event. His oral presentation was 342.6

an abridged version of his written statement, the full text of which was distributed to the participants, as shown in the enclosure.

342.7 The Millennium Summit, the third and culminating event, was held in response to a resolution of the General Assembly that expressed the conviction that “the year 2000 constitutes a unique and symbolically compelling moment to articulate and affirm an animating vision of the United Nations in the new era.” On the last day, the leaders of more than 150 nations unanimously adopted a declaration that began by asserting: “We, Heads of State and Government, have gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 6 to 8 September 2000, at the dawn of a new Millennium, to reaffirm our faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.”

342.8 Highlighting certain “fundamental values”—freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility—the leaders resolved to work towards such objectives as: peace, security and disarmament; development and the eradication of poverty; protecting our common environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations. They made a firm commitment to world peace and world order, concluding their declaration on this resounding note: “We solemnly reaffirm, on this historic occasion, that the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development. We therefore pledge our unstinting support for these common objectives, and our determination to achieve them.”

342.9 It is striking that the spokesman of civil society called upon by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to address so historic a gathering was Mr. Techeste Ahderom, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations. He was accorded this honor because as its cochair he had presided at the United Nations Millennium Forum. After all the national leaders had spoken and before the Summit had adopted its declaration on 8 September, Mr. Ahderom made a speech in which he conveyed to that unprecedented assemblage a report of the Forum. The text of his speech is enclosed herewith.

342.10 For any observer imbued with the Bahá’í vision of peace and its inherent processes, the substance and implications of these recent events, seen together with previous world conferences that during the last decade also involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed to contemplate. It

must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so early a stage in the Bahá'í era, representatives of our international community took part so notably in these occurrences that have set down milestones along the way towards that new World Order so clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

343

Continental Pioneer Committees

29 SEPTEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Over recent months the Universal House of Justice has been consulting ^{343.1} with the International Teaching Center regarding the role of the Continental Pioneer Committees in facilitating the movement of pioneers and traveling teachers. In the light of these discussions, the Teaching Center has suggested that certain changes be made to the responsibilities of the Committees. The enclosed statements of the present-day purpose and character of the Committees and of their responsibilities have been prepared by the Teaching Center to reflect these changes. The Universal House of Justice has approved that these documents now supersede the ones dated January 1990. We have been instructed to share them with all National Spiritual Assemblies.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

CONTINENTAL PIONEER COMMITTEES

A Statement on Their Present-Day Purpose and Character

5 September 2000

Prepared by the International Teaching Center

The launching of the Three Year Plan in 1993 marked the beginning ^{343.2} of a new stage in the promotion of international pioneering and travel-teaching. The pioneer call raised by the Universal House of Justice at that time, which encouraged the friends to arise from any part of the globe to

pioneer or travel-teach in any other part in need of assistance, resulted in a massive movement of believers in the international field. No longer was a distinction made between sending and receiving national communities, rather the entire Bahá'í world was asked to contribute to the expanding pool of pioneers and traveling teachers. Homefront pioneering, too, has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in recent years. As the human resources of each national community have grown through the instrumentality of the training institute, those eager to serve on the home front have increasingly arisen. Simultaneous to these developments, the responsibilities of the Continental Pioneer Committees have evolved. This statement of their present-day purpose and character and the attached document, describing their responsibilities in some detail, have been prepared to reflect their current role and in anticipation of still greater accomplishments.

343.3 The members of the Continental Pioneer Committees are invited to serve in that capacity by the Universal House of Justice for a term of three years. While some of the Committees are responsible for an entire continental area, others are zonally based within a continent. All Committees operate under the supervision of the International Teaching Center and serve primarily as executive agencies that facilitate the movement of pioneers and traveling teachers. This they achieve through the efficient management of information and by acting as channels for the disbursement of the International Deputization Fund.

343.4 The Continental Pioneer Committees obtain their information from a number of sources, among them the National Spiritual Assemblies and their committees, individual believers, reference materials containing general information on various countries, as well as reports from pioneers and traveling teachers in the field. However, the Continental Counselors, with whom the Committees have a close relationship, constitute their principal source of information. Through consultation with the Counselors, the Committees not only gain access to extensive experience and knowledge of the needs and potentialities of each country, but are also able to evaluate the information collected from various sources, set priorities, propose action, and obtain a more accurate understanding of their role as facilitators of pioneer and traveling teacher movement across the continent. It is hoped that serious attention will continue to be given to maintaining efficient lines of communication between the Pioneer Committees and the Continental Boards of Counselors. With this aim in mind, the full membership of each Continental Pioneer Committee, or at least the Secretary, should meet from

time to time with the respective Board of Counselors for consultation regarding the needs and opportunities in the continent.

In general, the Continental Pioneer Committees are concerned with facilitating the movement of individual pioneers and traveling teachers. In doing so, they can go far in seeing that those entering this field of service are directed towards a destination where their services can best be utilized, thus ensuring that the needs of the Cause are adequately and swiftly met. There will, however, be occasions when the institutions of the Faith in a region or country rich in human resources initiate projects designed to mobilize the believers and deploy them for service in other areas where opportunities are waiting to be optimized. Here the Committees will also have a vital role to play in helping to maintain the steady flow of the friends from one area to another.

In all that they do, the Continental Pioneer Committees are expected to be keen and alert. The institutions of the Faith and individual believers should be able to depend on the reliability, experience, and knowledge of the Committees. Pioneers and traveling teachers will continue to make a valuable contribution to the advancement of the Faith in the years ahead, and the Continental Pioneer Committees are one of the instruments placed at the disposition of the Bahá'í world to assist the believers who wish to serve the Cause in this field of endeavor.

344

Appointment of Continental Counselors

29 OCTOBER 2000

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Day of the Covenant, 26 November 2000, marks the commencement of a new five-year term of service for members of the Continental Boards of Counselors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith. The number of these high-ranking officers of the Cause remains at eighty-one. We are happy to announce the names of the Counselors now appointed.

AFRICA (19 Counselors): Beth Allen, George Allen, Beatrice Asare, Asfaw Tessema, Niaz Bushrui, Mehrnaz Ehsani (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Clément-Thyrrel Feizouré, Kobina Fynn, Ibrahim

Galadima, Kamaye Moussa, Eddy Lutchmaya, Enos Makhele, Maina Mkandawire, Rachel Ndegwa, Muḥammad Otmani, Ahmad Parsa, Garth Pollock, Antoinette Ziehi, Tiati à Zock.

344.1b **THE AMERICAS (19 Counselors)**: Eugene Andrews, Eloy Anello, Stephen Birkland, Gustavo Correa, Irma Nelly de Dooki, Abdu'l-Mis-sagh Ghadirian, Angélica Huerta, Antônio Gabriel Marques, Hervé Masrour, Catherine Monajjem, Rebequa Murphy, Carmen Elisa de Sadeghian, Arturo Serrano, Crystal Shoaie, David Smith, Marilyn Smith, Leticia de Solano, Rodrigo Tomás (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Dorothy Whyte.

344.1c **ASIA (19 Counselors)**: Fadel Ardakani, Baatar Uransaikhan, Nida-vanur Baskaran, Irene Chung, Jabbar Eidelkhani, Bijan Farid, Elena Grouzkova, David Huang (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Hu-maida Jumalon, Lee Lee Ludher, Delafuz Nassimova, Lori Noguchi, Jaya Gopan Ramasamy, Lateef Rashid, Foad Reyhani, Payam Shoghi, Zena Sorabjee, George Soraya, Rosalie Tran.

344.1d **AUSTRALASIA (11 Counselors)**: Beatrice Benson, Donald Blanks, David Chittleborough (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Jalal Mills, Sírus Naráqí, Manijeh Reyhani, Heather Simpson, Henry Tamashiro, Erama Ugaia, Robin White, Fereidoun Yazdani.

344.1e **EUROPE (13 Counselors)**: Fevziye Baki, Alla Borets, Uta von Both, Firouzeh Moghbel, Paul Öjemark, Patrick O'Mara (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Shahriar Razavi, Ihan Sezgin, Nosrat Tirandaz, Nicola Towfigh, Larissa Tsutskova, Sohrab Youssefian, Ivo Zerbes.

344.2 The following believers, whose contributions to the advancement of the Faith have earned our profound appreciation, are being relieved of the duties of membership on the Boards of Counselors:

344.2a Borhanoddin Afshin, Ben Ayala, Hooshidar Balazadeh, Patricia Coles, Parvine Djoneydi, Wilma Ellis, Tod Ewing, Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, Linda Gershuny, Louis Hénuzet, Hizzaya Hissani, Nobuko Iwakura, Abbas Katirai, Zekrullah Kazemi, Kim Myungjung, Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, Betra Majmeto, Peter McLaren, Alejandra Miller, Perin

Olyai, Nabil Perdu, Maija Pihlainen, Ruth Pringle, Polin Rafat, Daniel Ramoroesi, Shapour Rassekh, Cyrus Rohani, Vicente Samaniego, Isabel de Sánchez, Bruce Saunders, Errol Sealy, Edith Senoga, Farhad Shayani, Tiberiu Vajda, Lally Warren, Wingi Mabuku.

We are confident that these distinguished friends will continue to display the utmost valor and self-sacrifice in the pathway of service to Bahá'u'lláh. Our fervent prayers at the Holy Threshold will surround each of them. 344.3

The accomplishments of the Four Year Plan, now being consolidated, have established a pace of growth that is certain to gain added momentum. The Five Year Plan, to be launched at Ridván, holds immense promise. In the discharge of their responsibilities for the propagation and protection of the Faith, the Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members will play a vital role, in collaboration with Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Councils, in ensuring that the design and implementation of programs of action, from the national to the local level, respond to the exigencies of the hour. 344.4

The Counselors in all continents are being called to the World Center to take part in deliberations on the general features of the Five Year Plan from 9 to 13 January 2001. They will be joined by the Auxiliary Board members who will have gathered from throughout the world to participate in events marking the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel. The coming together of the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in the Holy Land, for the first time, on so propitious an occasion, will give further impetus to the activity that they will be required to sustain. 344.5

It is our earnest prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these eighty-one devoted souls will be assisted by grace from on high as they bend their energies to foster the systematic growth of the community worldwide. 344.6

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

345

Revision of Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

26 NOVEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{345.1} On 25 March 1987 you were sent a document titled “A Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh,” prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center; this document is cross-referenced to the compilation “Ḥuqúqu'lláh, The Right of God.”³⁴⁵⁻¹ At the request of the Universal House of Justice the Codification has recently been revised, to incorporate points made in certain of the quotations provided in the supplement to the compilation that was issued on 12 October 1992.

^{345.2} We now enclose a copy of the new revision of the Codification for circulation to the friends, to further assist in deepening their understanding of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

A CODIFICATION OF THE LAW OF ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH

Prepared by the Research Department

of the Bahá'í World Center in 1987,

and revised in 1999, at the request of the Universal House of Justice

Preamble

^{345.3} Ḥuqúqu'lláh (The Right of God) is a great law (7)³⁴⁵⁻² and a sacred institution (72).³⁴⁵⁻³ Laid down in the Most Holy Book (the 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 rami-

³⁴⁵⁻¹. The referenced compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh was released on 4 July 1985, and a new compilation entitled “Ḥuqúqu'lláh: The Right of God” was issued by the Universal House of Justice in April 2007.

³⁴⁵⁻². The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh issued by the Universal House of Justice.

³⁴⁵⁻³. Reference to the extract number in parentheses has been removed from the first sentence in the 2007 revision to the Codification.

fications 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. 345.4

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. 345.5

345.6 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.

A Bounty Granted by God

345.7 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).

345.8 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).

Determining the Ḥuqúqu'lláh

345.9 Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

A. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh are:

1. The residence and its needful³⁴⁵⁻⁴ furnishings (11).
2. The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce income for one's subsistence (12, 67, 68).

345-4. See III.C.1.

B. Payment falls due:

1. 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 equal approximately 2.2 troy ounces, or approximately 69.2 grams (87, 105, 110).]
 - a) The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the assessable property (10, 14).
 - b) The payment is due on whole units of 19 mithqáls of gold (15).
2. 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:
 - a) The general expenses of living (65, 66, 69, 78).
 - b) Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions (103).
 - c) Sums which are paid to the state, such as taxes and duties (78).
3. When a person receives a gift or bequest it is to be added to his or her possessions and augments the total value in the same way as does an excess of annual income over expenditure (111).
4. 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.
5. 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).
6. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (22).
7. The payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is dependent on the person's financial ability to meet his obligations (24).
8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his/her payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is accomplished in the following manner:
 - a) The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial (22).
 - b) Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (13).

- c) 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).
- C. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu'lláh:
 - 1. It is left to the individual to decide which expenses are to be regarded as “necessary” and therefore deductible in computing the annual accretion to savings, and which furnishings of the household are to be regarded as “needful” and therefore exempt from the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (57, 65–67, 69, 78, 80, 104–106, 112).
 - 2. 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).
 - 3. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honor their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).
 - 4. 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.
 - 5. 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 to treat contributions to the Fund as an expense when arriving at the value of his or her property in calculating the sum due to be paid as Ḥuqúqu'lláh (105).
- D. Additional notes, based on the first supplement to the Compilation:
 - 1. Whereas a believer has discretion to decide whether to treat his or her contributions to the Funds of the Faith as an expense, or make them only out of money on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh has been

- paid, he or she also has the discretion to treat some contributions in one way and some in the other. (Supp. 8)
2. One believer cannot discharge the obligation of another to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh, nor can a payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh be earmarked for any purpose or be made in honor of anyone. (Supp. 10)
 3. The law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh imposes an obligation only on individual believers, not on Bahá'í institutions or corporate bodies. (Supp. 11)
 4. Although the law provides a certain leeway in the timing of the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, it should preferably be paid by a believer during the course of his or her life whenever it falls due, and the only payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh which should need to be provided for by will is such additional liability as may be found to exist when the believer's affairs are reckoned up as at the date of death. (Supp. 12)
 5. Each believer should learn not only how to calculate Ḥuqúqu'lláh during the course of his or her life, but also how to provide for the payment of the balance remaining at the date of death. (Supp. 12)

Applicability of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

For many decades the sacred law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh had been applied only to the believers from the Middle East. The worldwide application was instituted by the Universal House of Justice as from Riḍván 1992, the beginning of the Holy Year marking the hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. 345.10

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 Bahá'í World Center (56). 345.11

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). 345.12

346

Message to the ASEAN Youth Conference in Thailand

23 DECEMBER 2000

To the Friends Gathered at the Seventh ASEAN Youth Conference in Thailand

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{346.1} You come together at a time of great promise for the region to which you belong. Each of your national communities made significant achievements during the Four Year Plan, and these are being further consolidated during these critical twelve months. In a few short weeks the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members will gather in the Holy Land to deliberate on the features of the Five Year Plan to be launched at Riḍván. Your role in this mighty undertaking cannot be overemphasized, and we look to the youth in Southeast Asia with great expectations. You need to continue resolutely on the path of service which you have so brilliantly begun. Through the insights you gain from the study of the Teachings and the capabilities of service that you develop, you can each become a source of inspiration and moral leadership to the masses of youth around you. In your deliberations you will need to devise ways to attract your peers to the Faith and persuade them to join you in your systematic study of institute courses so that, galvanized by the same vision that spurs you to action, they will actively participate in your movement.

^{346.2} Be assured of our loving prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts may be reinforced by the Supreme Concourse.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

347

Message to the Youth Conference in India

25 DECEMBER 2000

To the Friends Gathered at the Youth Conference
of the Indian Sub-Continent

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{347.1} Since the outset of the Four Year Plan we have observed with great pleasure the steadily increasing tempo of activity in the Indian sub-continent

and are well aware of the contribution that the youth have made to the advances achieved in recent years. We now see an able corps of devoted youth in each of your countries, touched by the spirit of the Faith and fired by the noble vision enshrined in the Writings, ready to play a significant role in the strengthening of the foundations of Bahá'í communities and in the spiritual regeneration of the society to which they belong.

Developing distinctive Bahá'í communities is a challenge you share with ^{347.2} the rest of your fellow believers in that vast and promising region. You need to exert every effort to align your thoughts and actions with the Teachings and become the source of inspiration and encouragement to others. When you come across passive acceptance of the Faith, respond with passion for teaching. When you see compromise of principles in the name of expediency, demonstrate an even greater sense of spiritual discipline. When you notice traces of tendencies that lead to division, show forth your ability to act as builders of unity. Aspire to the station of servitude at His Threshold.

Your national institute programs will help you develop your capabilities ^{347.3} of service, which will need to be directed not only to your own communities but to the society around you. The current generation of youth in the region is experiencing social change at a phenomenal rate. This change presents your peers with a host of unprecedented challenges, and the great majority finds itself in a state of utter confusion. Yet among them are many who aspire to create a new society in which justice prevails. Who but you, the dedicated servants of the Blessed Beauty, inspired and moved by His all-embracing vision of the new World Order, can show these youth the direction they seek? In your deliberations you will need to think of ways to attract your fellow youth to the Faith and persuade them to join you in your systematic study of the Teachings so that, galvanized by the same vision that spurs you to action, they can become active participants in your movement. Be assured of our loving prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts may be reinforced by the Supreme Concourse.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

348

The Five Year Plan

9 JANUARY 2001

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors
Dearly loved Friends,

348.1 Five years ago, we called on the body of Counselors assembled in the Holy Land to aid the Bahá'í world to understand and shoulder the challenges of systematic growth. The brilliant achievements of the Four Year Plan testify to the wholehearted response they made. Today, we ask for an equally great effort on your part, this time to ensure the successful launching of the Five Year Plan.

348.2 In your deliberations on the nature of this next stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, you need to take into account the magnitude of the changes occurring in the fortunes of the Faith. At the World Center, the raising of the great edifices now standing on the Arc represents a major step in the consolidation of a divinely appointed Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan witnessed a remarkable increase in the institutional capacity of Bahá'í communities in every continent. The evolution of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies has visibly accelerated, and Regional Councils, where they have been established, have brought a new energy and effectiveness to the work of the Cause. With the birth and efflorescence of more than 300 training institutes, the Faith now possesses a powerful instrument for developing the human resources needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation. Further, the ability of the Bahá'í community to influence the course of human affairs, both through its dealings with governments and organizations of civil society and through its endeavors in social and economic development, has been greatly enhanced. The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh stands at the threshold of a new epoch, at a moment in history when, despite confusion and outbursts of fresh hostility, the world has made real strides towards peace. One clearly sees an increasing receptivity to His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit.

348.3 Advancing the process of entry by troops will continue as the aim of the Five Year Plan—indeed the aim of the series of Plans that will carry the community to the end of the first century of the Formative Age. The acceleration of this vital process will be achieved through systematic activity

on the part of the three participants in the Plan: the individual believer, the institutions, and the community.

The Training Institute

A searching analysis of the Four Year Plan recently prepared for us by the International Teaching Center demonstrates that the training institute is effective not only in enhancing the powers of the individual, but also in vitalizing communities and institutions. The continued development of training institutes in the diverse countries and territories of the world, then, must be a central feature of the new Plan. 348.4

Drawing on the wealth of experience now accumulated in this area of endeavor, institutes will have to provide their communities with a constant stream of human resources to serve the process of entry by troops. Elements of a system that can meet the training needs of large numbers of believers have already been tested worldwide and have proven themselves. Study circles, reinforced by extension courses and special campaigns, have shown their ability to lend structure to the process of spiritual education at the grassroots. The value of a sequence of courses, each one following the other in a logical pattern and each one building on the achievements of the previous ones, has become abundantly clear. Various models are emerging that provide insight into how such sequences can be used to create training programs. In one example the main sequence, much like the trunk of a tree, supports courses branching out from it, each branch dedicated to some specific area of training. In another, several tracks of courses, each with its own focus, run parallel. Institutes will do well to examine these elements and approaches and employ them in a manner that responds to the opportunities before them. 348.5

At the outset of the Twelve Month Plan we underscored the need for Bahá'í children to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. There is every indication from the response of the friends thus far that a raised awareness of the importance of child education will, in fact, be a hallmark of this brief yet significant Plan. A new impetus has been given to Bahá'í children's classes. Increased awareness has also brought to light opportunities to offer moral and spiritual education to children in general, as exemplified by the success of the efforts to introduce courses on the Bahá'í Faith into programs of official school systems. 348.6

That institutes are placing more and more emphasis on the training of teachers for children's classes is a particularly encouraging sign. Other mea- 348.7

asures are equally essential if regular classes for every age are to be offered in Bahá'í communities throughout the world. In some countries, national and regional committees have been established to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in the discharge of their responsibility to educate children. In these, the relationship between the committees and the training institute will steadily evolve as experience is gained, each agency enhancing the work of the other. But there are many countries in which the institute is the only structure developing the capacity to organize and maintain courses in locality after locality. As this approach is working well with youth and adults, and increasingly for junior youth, there is no reason why the training institute should not also shoulder similar responsibility with respect to children, where necessary. As a general rule, institutes do not take on the administration of plans and programs for expansion and consolidation. Conducting children's classes, however, is a unique enterprise, of special urgency. In those countries where the task is given to it, the institute becomes a center of learning intensely engaged in the spiritual education of the friends from the tenderest age through adulthood.

Individual Initiative in Teaching

348.8 With the work of institutes growing in strength, attention has now to be given everywhere to systematizing teaching efforts. In the document "The Institution of the Counselors" just issued, we emphasize the role that the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants play in helping the friends to meet this challenge, both at the level of individual initiative and of collective volition. As individuals progress through institute courses, they deepen their knowledge of the Faith, gain insights, and acquire skills of service. Some of the courses devoted to teaching will no doubt treat the subject in general terms. Others will focus on various means of sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message with specific segments of society, incorporating the wisdom gleaned from the teaching endeavors of the friends. This combined process of action, learning and training will endow communities with an ever-increasing number of capable and eager teachers of the Cause.

348.9 Training alone, of course, does not necessarily lead to an upsurge in teaching activity.

348.10 In every avenue of service, the friends need sustained encouragement. Our expectation is that the Auxiliary Board members, together with their assistants, will give special thought to how individual initiative can be cultivated, particularly as it relates to teaching. When training and encourage-

ment are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá'u'lláh. They “raise high the sacred torch of faith,” as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, “labor ceaselessly, by day and by night,” and “consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word.”³⁴⁸⁻¹ So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth. They strive to be channels of the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, possessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers. Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.

Systematic Programs of Growth

During the coming months, you will be helping national communities, ^{348.11} whose circumstances differ widely, to formulate plans for systematic growth. There are many countries where increased institutional capacity, particularly at the level of the region, now makes it possible to focus attention on smaller geographic areas. Most of these will consist of a cluster of villages and towns, but, sometimes, a large city and its suburbs may constitute an area of this kind. Among the factors that determine the boundaries of a cluster are culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants. The areas into which a region divides will fall into various categories of development. Some will not yet be open to the Faith, while others will contain a few isolated localities and groups; in some, established communities will be gaining strength through a vigorous institute process; in a few, strong communities of deepened believers will be in a position to take on the challenges of systematic and accelerated expansion and consolidation.

Once the appropriate categories have been identified, national plans in ^{348.12} these countries will need to make provision for the progressive opening of virgin areas through the settlement of homefront pioneers. Such goals can be met with relative ease if pioneers are experienced in institute programs and are able to use their methods and materials in raising up a group of dedicated believers who can carry the work of the Faith forward in the area.

348-1. SWAB, no. 204.2.

Precious indeed will be the privilege of those who, in the remaining years of the first century of the Formative Age, place their trust in God and arise with fervor to take the lead in carrying the light of Divine guidance to every part of their countries. It is our hope that this call for homefront pioneers will generate great enthusiasm among the friends and open before their eyes a new vista of possibilities to serve the Faith.

348.13 According to this scheme, national plans will also need to include provision for the strengthening of other areas which, although open to the Faith, have yet to reach the level of development that prepares them for intensive activity. In those areas where strong communities with a corps of deepened believers exist, systematic programs for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith should be established forthwith. We have already indicated that the International Teaching Center has identified certain patterns of growth appropriate for relatively small geographical areas. Since then, it has analyzed several pilot projects in various parts of the world, and its findings are highly encouraging. The lessons learned now provide a body of experience for the launching of programs for systematic growth in area after area. As you consult on this matter with National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Councils, you will want to keep the Teaching Center informed.

348.14 It is important that national communities not rush into establishing intensive programs in an area before conditions are propitious. These conditions include: a high level of enthusiasm among a sizeable group of devoted and capable believers who understand the prerequisites for sustainable growth and can take ownership of the program; some basic experience on the part of a few communities in the cluster in holding classes for the spiritual education of children, devotional meetings, and the Nineteen Day Feast; the existence of a reasonable degree of administrative capacity in at least a few Local Spiritual Assemblies; the active involvement of several assistants to Auxiliary Board members in promoting community life; a pronounced spirit of collaboration among the various institutions working in the area; and above all, the strong presence of the training institute with a scheme of coordination that supports the systematic multiplication of study circles.

348.15 Programs initiated in such areas should aim at fostering sustainable growth by building the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the institution, and the community. Far from requiring grandiose and elaborate plans, these programs should focus on a few measures that have proven over the years to be indispensable to large-scale expansion and consolidation. Success will depend on the manner in which lines of action are integrated

and on the attitude of learning that is adopted. The implementation of such a program will require the close collaboration of the institute, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and an Area Teaching Committee.

At the core of the program must lie a sound and steady process of expansion, matched by an equally strong process of human resource development. A range of teaching efforts needs to be carried out, involving both activities undertaken by the individual and campaigns promoted by the institutions. As the number of believers in the area rises, a significant percentage should receive training from the institute, and their capabilities be directed towards the development of local communities. 348.16

Our message of 26 December 1995 delineating the features of the Four Year Plan made reference to the stages through which a community passes as it develops. The experience that has been gained in the ensuing years in working with communities at various stages will prove valuable to programs of growth. One of the first steps in implementing the program may well be a survey to determine the condition of each locality in the area. Among the initial goals for every community should be the establishment of study circles, children's classes, and devotional meetings, open to all the inhabitants of the locality. The observance of the Nineteen Day Feast has to be given due weight, and consistent effort should be made to strengthen the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Once communities are able to sustain the basic activities of Bahá'í life, a natural way to further their consolidation is to introduce small projects of social and economic development—for example, a literacy project, a project for the advancement of women or environmental preservation, or even a village school. As strength builds, the responsibility for an increasing number of lines of action is to be devolved onto the Local Spiritual Assemblies. 348.17

Throughout the endeavor, periodic meetings of consultation in the area need to reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought. The best approach is to formulate plans for a few months at a time, beginning with one or two lines of action and gradually growing in complexity. Those who are actively involved in the implementation of plans, whether members of the institutions or not, should be encouraged to participate fully in the consultations. Other area-wide gatherings will also be necessary. Some of these will provide opportunity for the sharing of experience and further training. Others will focus on the use of the arts and the enrichment of culture. Together, such gatherings will support an intense process of action, consultation and learning. 348.18

348.19 The friends who participate in these intensive programs of growth should bear in mind that the purpose is to ensure that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh reaches the masses of humanity and enables them to achieve spiritual and material progress through the application of the Teachings. Vast numbers among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties that Bahá'u'lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed themselves to building the new society He has envisioned. In learning to systematize their large-scale teaching work, Bahá'í communities are becoming better equipped to respond to this longing. They cannot withhold whatever effort, whatever sacrifice, may be called for.

A Spiritual Enterprise

348.20 Clearly, the scheme described here, while suitable to many national communities, cannot be applied in every situation. We count on the ability of the Bahá'í institutions to create plans which, if not reflecting the total scheme above, will incorporate elements of its vision, according to the circumstances of each national community. Bahá'í communities are, of course, engaged in a range of indispensable endeavors such as public information activity, proclamation efforts, external affairs work, production of literature, and complex social and economic development projects. Most certainly, as plans are devised, they will also address these challenges.

348.21 The nature of the planning process with which you will be helping the friends is in many ways unique. At its core it is a spiritual process in which communities and institutions strive to align their pursuits with the Will of God. The Major Plan of God is at work and the forces it generates impel humanity towards its destiny. In their own plans of action, the institutions of the Faith must seek to gain insight into the operation of these great forces, explore the potentialities of the people they serve, measure the resources and strengths of their communities, and take practical steps to enlist the unreserved participation of the believers. The nurturing of this process is the sacred mission entrusted to you. We have every confidence in your ability to achieve it. May Bahá'u'lláh bless and sustain you through His unflinching grace and mighty confirmations.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

349

The Institution of the Counselors

12 JANUARY 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has prepared the enclosed document on the institution of the Counselors, which describes in some detail the nature of that institution and its place in the Administrative Order. It has been given to the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members now gathered in the Holy Land for the events marking the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel. ^{349.1}

The document is a digest of the guidance previously issued on this subject and consists of two parts. The first provides an overview of the various components of the institution and their duties, while the second is a list of statements addressing specific aspects of its functioning. The House of Justice hopes that this document will shed light not only on the responsibilities of the Counselors and their auxiliaries but also on the workings of the Administrative Order in general, and commends it to the study of the friends at all levels. ^{349.2}

Five copies are being provided to each National Spiritual Assembly. Additional copies will not be made available from the World Center, although an electronic copy of the text can be forwarded to you upon request. ^{349.3}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

350

Inauguration of the International Teaching Center Building on Mount Carmel

14 JANUARY 2001

To the Conference Marking the Inauguration
of the International Teaching Center Building

Dearly loved Friends,

We are filled with a sense of triumph as we reflect on the significance of the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat ^{350.1}

on the Mountain of the Lord. This occasion marks the beginning of what future generations will regard as a splendid chapter in the annals of our Faith.

350.2 What joy that the Hands of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá are able to participate in these proceedings! We acknowledge the great debt of gratitude owed to them and to the departed ones of their exalted rank for so much of what we have come to celebrate.

350.3 And how fitting it is that the Continental Counselors and their deputies from the five continents are here to witness such an auspicious beginning! The attendance of the Auxiliary Board members is so unusual a feature of the gathering that we are impelled to address our remarks particularly to them. Indeed, on no occasion in the past have the major constituents of the institution of the Counselors ever assembled in the Holy Land.

350.4 With joyous hearts, we extend to every member of the Auxiliary Boards a special and loving welcome. We hail this opportunity to greet and thank these officers of an institution the crucial importance of whose vital role in the progress of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is increasingly demonstrated as the Divine Plan unfolds. May we not at such a moment invoke, above all, the memory of him in whose divinely inspired mind the conception of Auxiliary Boards took shape? Up until the time of his passing in 1957, Shoghi Effendi had called for the appointment of seventy-two such officers, who were evenly divided between the two Boards on each of the five continents; with the institutional evolution that has taken place since then, the number has increased to nearly one thousand.

350.5 With the International Teaching Center having settled into its position at the heart of a ramified, global institution, we can readily recognize the fruition of the system set to extend into the future the specialized functions of propagation and protection originally assigned to the Hands of the Cause—a system that has derived impetus from the guidance and example of these irreplaceable appointees of Shoghi Effendi. This achievement is in itself a thrilling indication of how well the Cause is faring.

350.6 In you, the Auxiliary Board members here assembled, is reflected the whole world of humanity. You hail from far-flung geographic regions and cultural backgrounds that make you truly representative of a cross-section of the human family. Your coming here both reaffirms the existence of a dynamic, global community and signals the possibilities for an advance in the process of entry by troops far beyond any record yet established. In

this latter regard, the value of your immediate future services cannot be overestimated.

The world's crying need for the divine prescriptions is made plain by the ills afflicting society at every level in all parts of the planet. We must be swift in ministering to this need. Doing so largely depends upon the revolutionary vision, the creative drive and systematic effort of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, who prompt and encourage individuals, institutions and communities to act with dispatch, constancy and enthusiasm. Their operation at the grassroots, at the very wellspring, of individual and collective activity, makes manageable the fulfillment of this pressing need. 350.7

In contemplating the sublime purpose that has brought us together on this day, we find ourselves without words to describe adequately our wonderment at the evidences of Bahá'u'lláh's handiwork. We stand too close to the moment to comprehend the magnitude of what has been so amazingly accomplished. But to ponder the circumstances attending seminal happenings of the past is to awaken in us all some sense of appreciation for their wonderful consequences in our time. The revelation of the Tablet of Carmel, the interment of the remains of Bahá'u'lláh's martyred Forerunner in the mausoleum constructed by the beloved Master, the creation by our dear Guardian of the Arc on the Hill of God—reflections on just such historic landmarks illumine our understanding and evoke gratitude in our hearts. 350.8

The journeys that brought you to these sacred precincts have launched you on spiritual adventures that will be celebrated in times to come as having imparted a new impetus to the advancement of the Cause. This is the hope and expectation we cherish. For as you drink deep of the rarefied spirit of the Holy Shrines and imbibe the guidance that will flow from the consultations in which you will participate, there can be no doubt that you will find yourselves endowed with a new confidence, a new power. With so rich an endowment, how can your endeavors fail? Most surely, you will bring a rejuvenated fervor and a reconsecrated effort to the compelling civilizing tasks you have accepted to perform at this potent juncture in the evolution of our glorious Faith. 350.9

Our supplications are intermingled with yours that the Blessed Beauty may abundantly confirm you in His service. 350.10

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

351

Conference of the Continental Counselors

16 JANUARY 2001

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

^{351.1} As we write you this message, the Conference of the Continental Counselors approaches a triumphant conclusion.

^{351.2} For eight days the Counselors from all the continents have consulted on the next phase of the process of entry by troops. While they were meeting during the first five days, 849 members of their Auxiliary Boards from 172 countries were arriving at the Bahá'í World Center and paying their respects at the Holy Shrines in anticipation of the moment when they would all come together in a series of soul-stirring events: ascent of the newly built Terraces on Mount Carmel; circumambulation of the Shrine of the Báb; procession along the Arc path for a visit to the International Teaching Center Building; a devotional ceremony to mark the occupation by the Teaching Center of its permanent seat; and subsequent joint consultations concerning their indispensable role in the Five Year Plan on which the Bahá'í world will embark at Riḍván 2001.

^{351.3} The deliberations of the Counselors themselves have been the heart of these stupendous activities. Their consultations have been marked by a combination of sobriety and effervescence that has refined the character of their discussions and illumined understanding. It is clear from the confident atmosphere in which they have conferred that their institution has reached a new stage in its maturation. Even though they function principally as individuals, the Counselors across all Boards have become of one mind. By internalizing and integrating the lessons and experiences of systematization called for in the Four Year Plan, they have indeed been transformed into channels of unified thought. We appreciate that the new height in the evolution of their institution is a reflection, too, of the measure to which, with their wise and constant advice, the Spiritual Assemblies and other institutions of the world community have evolved.

^{351.4} As the time for the Conference drew near, there were signs that the Faith had arrived at a point in its development beyond which a new horizon opens before us. Such intimations were communicated in our report last Riḍván of the change in culture of the Bahá'í community as training institutes

emerged, as the construction projects on Mount Carmel approached their completion, and as the internal processes of institutional consolidation and the external processes towards world unity became more fully synchronized. They were elaborated in the message we addressed to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors a few days ago. But the extraordinary dynamics at work throughout the Conference crystallized these indications into a recognizable reality. With a spirit of exultation we are moved to announce to you: the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh now enters the fifth epoch of its Formative Age.

Recognition of this milestone falls within the patterns established by ^{351.5} Shoghi Effendi for marking measures of time in the history of the Cause; he foresaw among these a succession of epochs occurring in the Formative Age. It must fill every devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh with joy and wonder that His Administrative Order has reached so important a point at so crucial a time, when so many members of the institution of the Counselors are gathered in splendid array at the World Center of His Faith. They will return to the far corners of the earth as torches aflame with the spirit of service. That they will pour fresh energy into their activities, there can be no doubt. Their efforts will surely widen the path leading to the success of the Twelve Month Plan, and through that to the launching at Riḍván of the five year enterprise that will be the first in a series of Plans to be pursued until the centenary of the Formative Age.

The Counselors will leave here anticipating their early consultations with ^{351.6} National Spiritual Assemblies regarding the operation in their countries of the forthcoming Plan. With the involvement of their eager auxiliaries, they will assist, too, in quickly moving the requisite planning process to regional and local areas of the community in every land.

In the waning moments of these eventful days, our hearts are turned in ^{351.7} humble gratitude to the Ancient Beauty for the abundance of the blessings He has bestowed. The very earth of Carmel is astir with the wonders of His grace as she responds to the redemptive call He raised in the Tablet bearing her name. His fervent wish expressed therein resounds in the souls of His lovers throughout the planet: “Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation. . . .”³⁵¹⁻¹ The friends now gathered

351-1. GWB, no. 11.4.

amid the splendor at Carmel's heart have heard it with new ears and have reaffirmed their pledge to respond to this divine longing. May their exploits in the Name of Bahá scatter more widely the fragrance of His Revelation, strengthen more firmly the foundation of His institutions, and embolden more resolutely the activities of His worldwide community, impelling forward the process by which troop after troop will enter into the stronghold of the Ark of Salvation.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

352

Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Not Yet Universally Applied

8 FEBRUARY 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

^{352.1} On 9 May 1993,³⁵²⁻¹ each National Spiritual Assembly was sent a copy of a letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iceland on 9 June 1974,³⁵²⁻² which listed those laws not at that time binding upon the Western world. The covering letter noted that the law of *Huqúqu'lláh* had been made universally binding at *Riḍván* 1992. On 28 December 1999, the Universal House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'ís throughout the world informing them of the universal application of the remaining aspects of the laws of prayer and fasting.³⁵²⁻³

^{352.2} Therefore, to bring the information up to date, we have been asked to send you the enclosed list of laws not yet universally applied, to replace the one sent to you in May 1993.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

352-1. See no. 153, pp. 333–34.

352-2. MUHJ, no. 147.

352-3. See no. 315, pp. 697–99.

LAWS OF THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS NOT YET UNIVERSALLY APPLIED28 DECEMBER 1999

Following the universal application of the laws on prayer, fasting and the recitation of the Greatest Name, the Universal House of Justice has provided the following list of laws noted in the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which are not at present universally binding upon the friends. The numbers of the sections are given for ease of reference. 352.3

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 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 & m | The laws concerning the traveling of a husband away from his wife. |
| IV.C.1.n & 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.d | The law of the <i>Mashriqu'l-Adhkár</i> 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 of the deceased is a believer over the age of 15. |
| IV.D.1.p | The law of tithes. |

- IV.D.1.r The law concerning the hunting of animals.
- IV.D.1.t, u, v & w The law 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, xiv, xv, xvi & xvii Arson, adultery, murder and theft are all forbidden to Bahá'ís, but the punishments prescribed for them in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* are designed for a future state of society. Such matters are usually covered by the civil laws of each country.
- IV.D.1.y, xxv, xxx, xxxi & xxxii The laws prohibiting the use of the type of pools which used to be found in Persian baths, the plunging of one's hand in food, the shaving of one's head and growth of men's hair below the lobe of the ear.

352.4 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.

353

Approval and Testing of Persian Radio Broadcasts

14 MARCH 2001

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

353.1 We are pleased to inform you that the Universal House of Justice has approved a project involving radio broadcasts in Persian, entitled "Payam-e-Doost," to reach the Cradle of the Faith, as well as Iranians in other parts of the world. Steps are currently being taken to make regular broadcasts possible in a few months time; however, for the success of the project your assistance is requested.

353.2 In order to test the transmissions of programs being broadcast, a three-day trial period will be held this coming Naw-Rúz. It is not clear which countries or regions will be able to receive the broadcast clearly, and which

will not be able to pick it up at all. You are therefore kindly asked to select a number of reliable Persian-speaking Bahá'ís in your communities, who will listen to the program, check the quality and strength of the signal, and report their findings to your Assembly immediately following the testing period, so that you can promptly pass this information to the Bahá'í World Center, no later than 30 March 2001.

Three hours of shortwave radio programs on the theme of Naw-Rúz have been prepared for this test and will be aired twice daily on 20, 21 and 22 March 2001. The broadcast will be between 18:00–19:00 GMT each night on 5890 kilohertz, shortwave band, and repeated the same evening between 19:00–20:00 GMT on 7480 kilohertz, shortwave band. ^{353.3}

The friends should report whether they received any signal from each hour of the program during each day of the broadcast, whether the first or second broadcast each day produced a stronger signal or better reception, and in which city or area they sought the transmission. It is important, at this stage, to limit information about this project to the Bahá'ís assigned to the task, as wide publicity may jeopardize the launch of future programs. ^{353.4}

Your assistance in this historic undertaking is much appreciated by the House of Justice. ^{353.5}

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

354

Publication of Century of Light

1 APRIL 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have been asked to forward to you a copy of the enclosed publication, *Century of Light*, produced at the request and under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice. ^{354.1}

The purpose of the document, which quotes extensively from the Bahá'í Writings and the related commentaries of the Guardian, is to provide members of the Faith with a perspective on two defining processes that unfolded during the twentieth century: on the one hand, the sequence of events that ^{354.2}

made the unification of humanity the principal feature of modern history and, on the other, the emergence from obscurity of the Cause of God and its Administrative Order. It is the hope of the House of Justice that editions in a range of languages will make this material accessible to the members of Bahá'í communities throughout the world.

354.3 Some believers may wish to share copies with non-Bahá'í friends who they believe would find the contents of particular interest, and there is no objection to their doing so on an individual basis. It should be clear, however, that *Century of Light* is primarily a resource for Bahá'í study and deepening. It is not a public information publication, nor is it intended as a presentation piece for public figures or the media.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

355

Attitude of Bahá'ís and Bahá'í Institutions toward Those Who Have Withdrawn from the Faith

4 APRIL 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies
Dear Bahá'í Friends,

355.1 The International Teaching Center has sought elucidation of issues concerning the attitude of Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions towards those who have withdrawn from the Faith. In response, we have provided the following comments, which are being sent to you for your information and guidance. You are free to share this letter with the believers under your jurisdiction as you wish.

355.2 One's beliefs are an internal and personal matter; no person or institution has the right to exert compulsion in matters of belief. Since there is a wide range of meanings in the Sacred Scriptures, there are bound to be different ways in which individuals understand many of the Bahá'í teachings. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the viability of the Bahá'í community that its members share a common understanding of essentials. This implies a commitment by each member to function within the framework established by such an understanding.

355.3 This framework includes, for example, cognizance of the existence of a Divine Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestation of God for this

age, and acceptance of the two primary duties prescribed by God, as expressed in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation. These are: “recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws,” and observance of “every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties,” the *Aqdas* firmly states, “are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.”³⁵⁵⁻¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whom Bahá’u’lláh appointed as the Interpreter of His writings, reaffirms these fundamentals of Bahá’í belief. In His Will and Testament He writes: “This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): ‘His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.’”³⁵⁵⁻²

It is within the context of these statements of basic belief and practice that membership in the Bahá’í Faith is determined. Acknowledging that the matter of ascertaining the qualification of a true believer is a delicate and complex question, Shoghi Effendi, the appointee of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as Guardian of the Cause and authorized interpreter of its teachings, set down for Spiritual Assemblies the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded as 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. . . .”³⁵⁵⁻³

Viewed in the light of these texts, a statement that one wishes to withdraw from the Bahá’í community, but not from the Faith, is seen to be self-contradictory. The Bahá’í community must be seen in its proper light. The necessity for its existence as an inseparable element of the Faith itself

355-1. KA, ¶1.

355-2. WT, p. 19.

355-3. BA, p. 90.

is explained by the stated purpose of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: to bring about a Divine Civilization. The embodiment of that purpose and of the spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh into the world is the Order He has ordained, to which He refers in the Most Holy Book in asserting: "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."³⁵⁵⁻⁴

355.7 Normally, a Spiritual Assembly is called upon to make a decision in such matters only as the result of an action by an individual, either in declaring his belief in Bahá'u'lláh, or in stating that he wishes to withdraw from the Faith, or, very rarely, in persistently promoting concepts which are clearly inconsistent with the essentials of membership outlined above.

355.8 Acceptance of the Faith is the voluntary act of an individual and is registered by the appropriate Bahá'í institution unless it has good reason not to do so. Likewise, a Bahá'í is free to leave the Faith voluntarily. When a member of the community informs the Assembly of his wish to withdraw, it would try to help him overcome whatever problems seem to be the cause of his desiring to take such a step. If he persists in his intention, the Assembly would normally accept the withdrawal unless there were grounds for suspecting that he is acting insincerely out of some ulterior motive, such as to violate a Bahá'í law with impunity.

355.9 In spite of loving encouragement given by their Assemblies, not all Bahá'ís are active in the work of the community. This does not, of course, necessarily indicate withdrawal. An Assembly should carefully distinguish between those who are not active but still identify themselves with the Faith, and those whose inactivity indicates complete lack of interest and a wish to have nothing more to do with the Cause.

355.10 Once a person's resignation from the Faith has been accepted, his status is that of a non-Bahá'í and—except as noted below—his relationship with Bahá'í institutions and individual believers is the same as that of any other non-Bahá'í. As in all human relationships, the closeness of this connection, and the warmth of friendship, depend upon personal factors.

355.11 Sometimes, after a person's withdrawal from the Cause has been accepted, it becomes evident that his statements were insincere and were made

355-4. *GWB*, no. 70.1.

merely in order to evade Bahá'í law. The Assembly need not take any overt action in such a case, but would note the matter in its records. In other words, it would have to be cautious about accepting a subsequent declaration of belief from this individual until satisfied that it is made in good faith. Also, depending upon the circumstances, the Assembly might require him to rectify the action, taken in violation of Bahá'í law, which was the motive for his withdrawing from the Faith.

An analogous situation arises when a person who is engaged in some activity which he suspects would result in his being declared a Covenant-breaker withdraws from the Faith under the impression that this step would prevent such an outcome. The Universal House of Justice may conclude that the withdrawal provides adequate protection of the community from the individual in question. However, if he persists, following his withdrawal, in trying to undermine the Covenant or joins forces with Covenant-breakers, he may be judged to have broken the Covenant, and the friends would be told to have no association with him. Each such case would be considered in the context of its specific circumstances. 355.12

There is one other condition which should be mentioned. There are certain former Bahá'ís whose actions do not necessarily constitute Covenant-breaking, but are seriously destructive. Where such people have shown that they are impervious to explanations or exhortations from the Bahá'í institutions, continued association with them can be burdensome and can exert a spiritually corrosive effect on the faith of believers. In such cases the Head of the Faith may simply advise the Bahá'ís to leave them to their own devices. 355.13

Thus, there are exceptional cases in which a former believer's spiritual attitude to the Faith may, to various degrees, create an estrangement between him and the Bahá'ís. In general, however, a person who has withdrawn from the Faith is regarded as being among the generality of humankind with whom the Bahá'ís are enjoined to associate "in joy and fragrance." 355.14

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

356

The Lesser Peace

19 APRIL 2001

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

356.1 The principal issue raised in your letter is that of the timing for the occurrence of the Lesser Peace, in light of your impression that the Bahá'í Writings anticipate its coming before the conclusion of the twentieth century; i.e., the end of December 2000.

356.2 Enclosed for your information is a copy of a memorandum prepared by the Research Department, at the request of the House of Justice, on the subject of the attainment of the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. Assembled in this document are a number of pertinent passages from authoritative texts of the Faith.

356.3 In reviewing this material it becomes apparent that there is nothing in the authoritative Bahá'í Writings to indicate that the Lesser Peace would be established before the end of the twentieth century. However, there are clear statements affirming that the unity of nations would be, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "securely established" during the twentieth century.

356.4 These statements, and others appearing in the enclosed document, should be viewed from the perspective that the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is an organic process proceeding in accordance with the Divine Will and animated by a spiritual reality. In response to a question, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "The kingdom of peace, salvation, uprightness, and reconciliation is founded in the invisible world, and it will by degrees become manifest and apparent through the power of the Word of God!" As a result of consecrated human endeavor over decades, and indeed centuries, this spiritual reality is gradually expressed in physical form.

356.5 An orientation to process is apparent throughout the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi concerning the attainment of world peace. For example, the Guardian reported the Master as having acclaimed actions taken at the conclusion of the First World War to have signalized "the dawn of the Most Great Peace." This stands in contrast to preoccupation with the short term in the wider society today which focuses exclusively on events rather than on evolutionary processes.

You should also take note of the distinction between the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. Shoghi Effendi, in response to questions from believers, clarified that “unity in the political realm,” to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred in his enunciation of the seven candles of unity, “is a unity which politically independent and sovereign *states* achieve among themselves.” As expressed in the passages cited in the enclosed memorandum, the Lesser Peace will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the various governments of the world. The unity of nations can be taken as that unity which arises from a recognition among the peoples of the various nations, that they are members of one common human family. 356.6

The twentieth century has been distinguished by the emergence of the unity of nations, to which both Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice have referred in the enclosed document. This movement, the evidence of which accumulates with each passing day, stands in sharp contrast to the nationalistic tenor of the nineteenth century, and is an evidence of the spirit of a new age moving in the hearts of humankind. Viewed from this perspective, there can be no doubt that the promise of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been fulfilled, and the unity of nations securely established in the century now concluded. The further expansion and strengthening of this consciousness of world solidarity in the years to come will have their effect in the political realm, and will influence the evolution towards world government. 356.7

It should not be imagined that the processes now moving in the world will be free from challenge or difficulty. There may well be setbacks, and conflicts may erupt periodically, as humanity proceeds towards the emergence and consolidation of the Lesser Peace, giving rise in due course to the establishment of the Most Great Peace. 356.8

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

MEMORANDUM

19 APRIL 2001

To the Universal House of Justice

From the Research Department

Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace

Introduction:

^{356.9} The Bahá'í Writings about world peace envisage the Most Great Peace coming as the culmination of two distinct processes which unfold gradually over a lengthy period. One of these processes concerns the growth and development of the Bahá'í community, with the evolution of the Administrative Order and its efflorescence in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The other process, the subject of this memorandum, is associated with developments in the wider society, notably the attainment of the unity of nations and the establishment of the Lesser Peace.

Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace:

^{356.10} Shoghi Effendi refers to Bahá'u'lláh addressing “all the kings of the earth, summoning them to cleave to the Lesser Peace, as distinct from that Most Great Peace which those who are fully conscious of the power of His Revelation and avowedly profess the tenets of His Faith can alone proclaim and must eventually establish. . . .”³⁵⁶⁻¹ In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

^{356.10a} Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.

^{356.10b} O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

^{356.10c} Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should anyone among you take up arms

356-1. PDC, ¶58.

against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.³⁵⁶⁻²

In another passage, Bahá' u'lláh has related the Lesser Peace to the gathering together of world leaders at a convocation in which measures for unity and concord would be devised. 356.11

We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth—may God aid them through His strengthening grace—to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced.³⁵⁶⁻³ 356.11a

The theme of a gathering to deliberate on the measures required for an enduring world peace is referred to in several other places in the Writings of Bahá' u'lláh, including: 356.12

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. 356.12a

356-2. PDC, ¶60–62.

356-3. ESW, pp. 30–31.

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. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation.³⁵⁶⁻⁴

356.13 Subsequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá specified one of the outcomes of this convocation to be a comprehensive treaty, the provisions of which would be binding on all governments:

356.13a True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. 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

356-4. *GWB*, no. 117.1.

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.³⁵⁶⁻⁵

Distinct from, but closely related to, this theme is the promise by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, both orally and in writing, that the unity of nations will be established during the twentieth century, as an essential foundation for world peace. 356.14

In one of His talks, He stated: 356.15

I am most hopeful that in this century these lofty thoughts shall be conducive to human welfare. Let this century be the sun of previous centuries, the effulgences of which shall last forever, so that in times to come they shall glorify the twentieth century, saying the twentieth century was the century of lights, the twentieth century was the century of life, the twentieth century was the century of international peace. . . .³⁵⁶⁻⁶ 356.15a

As was reported in the *Montreal Daily Star* newspaper: 356.16

“Are there any signs that the permanent peace of the world will be established in anything like a reasonable period?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked. “It will be established in this century,” He answered. “It will be universal in the twentieth century. All nations will be forced into it.”³⁵⁶⁻⁷ 356.16a

356-5. WOB, pp. 37–38.

356-6. PUP, p. 174.

356-7. ABC, p. 35.

356.17 In commenting on other pronouncements of the Master on this theme, the House of Justice stated the following in a letter written on its behalf on 29 July 1974:

356.17a 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.”

356.18 However, attainment of the unity of nations should not be regarded as being synonymous with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. In answer to a question about the timing of the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi stated, in a letter written on his behalf in 1946, that: “All we know is that the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace *will* come—their *exact* dates we do not know.”³⁵⁶⁻⁸

356.19 Nevertheless, the unity of nations can quite properly be regarded as one stage—and indeed a highly significant step—in the lengthy process of the establishment of the Lesser Peace. In response to a question from an individual, the House of Justice stated, in a letter written on its behalf on 31 January 1985, that:

356.19a 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

356-8. LG, no. 1425.

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. . . . 356.19b

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."³⁵⁶⁻⁹ 356.19c

The progressive development of the Lesser Peace, including its consolidation, is clarified by the statement of the Guardian, in his letter of Ridván 105 B.E. to the friends in the East, concerning the duration of the Formative Age: 356.20

Its duration is unknown and lies concealed within the treasury of God's knowledge. Its termination will coincide with the establishment of this most perfect, this most mighty Order throughout the East and the West, the resplendent emergence of organic unity among the component parts of human society, and the consolidation of the foundations of the Lesser Peace among the governments and nations of the world. 356.20a

Further elaboration was provided by the House of Justice when requested by an individual believer to clarify the following passage from the 1996 Ridván message: 356.21

However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks 356.21a

356-9. MUHJ, no. 422.

and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God's Faith, as the Most Great Peace.

356.22 In the letter of 29 July 1996 sent on its behalf in reply to that individual, the House of Justice wrote:

356.22a Clearly, the emergence of the Lesser Peace will be a gradual process and its various stages will no doubt witness tests and setbacks, as well as great advances. It will certainly include, however, a development of historic importance: that point at which the majority of the world's nation-states formally commit themselves to a global order comprising institutions and laws, and equipped with the means by which collective decisions can be enforced. While we cannot at present foresee the precise form that this development will take, much less the point at which it will occur, we recognize that it is a feature of the process of the Lesser Peace.

356.23 With the emphasis being given in recent years to the completion of the present phase in the construction of the Edifices of the Administrative Order on the slopes of Mount Carmel, some believers have enquired whether there is a causative relationship between the accomplishment of this construction program and the establishment of the Lesser Peace. The Secretariat of the House of Justice responded to one such enquiry, in a letter of 14 December 1987, as follows:

356.23a The Universal House of Justice . . . has instructed us to say that it knows of nothing in the writings of the Faith to indicate that the establishment of the Lesser Peace depends on the completion of the Arc on Mount Carmel.

356.23b The passage which may have given rise to this conception may well be the statement made by the beloved Guardian which is published on pages 74–75 of *Messages to the Bahá'í World*. . . . You will note that in this passage the Guardian describes three things which will synchronize. It is important to note that he is describing, not events, but processes or developments and, although he says they will synchronize—a statement which in itself provides important guidance for the institutions of the Cause—he does not state that they are dependent one upon the other.

The Events of the Twentieth Century:

It is useful to review some of the statements appearing in the Bahá'í Writings concerning the events in the twentieth century which represent stages in the progression of humanity towards the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. In 1931 Shoghi Effendi characterizes the emergence of world mindedness in the following terms: 356.24

To the states and principalities just emerging from the welter of the great Napoleonic upheaval, whose chief preoccupation was either to recover their rights to an independent existence or to achieve their national unity, the conception of world solidarity seemed not only remote but inconceivable. It was not until the forces of nationalism had succeeded in overthrowing the foundations of the Holy Alliance that had sought to curb their rising power, that the possibility of a world order, transcending in its range the political institutions these nations had established, came to be seriously entertained. It was not until after the World War that these exponents of arrogant nationalism came to regard such an order as the object of a pernicious doctrine tending to sap that essential loyalty upon which the continued existence of their national life depended. 356.24a

A highly significant milestone in this process was the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War, an event which was praised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, despite His warning that: 356.25

. . . although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. 356.25a

In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, Shoghi Effendi affirmed that: 356.26

Though the great outcry raised by post-war nationalism is growing louder and more insistent every day, the League of Nations is as yet in its embryonic state, and the storm clouds that are gathering may for a time totally eclipse its powers and obliterate its machinery, yet the 356.26a

356-10. WOB, p. 44.

356-11. SWAB, no. 227.31.

direction in which the institution itself is operating is most significant. The voices that have been raised ever since its inception, the efforts that have been exerted, the work that has already been accomplished, foreshadow the triumphs which this presently constituted institution, or any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.³⁵⁶⁻¹²

^{356.27} He drew attention to “the most significant landmarks in its checkered history,” outstanding among which was its decision to impose collective sanctions upon a member which the League deemed to have committed an act of aggression. Shoghi Effendi pointed out that:

^{356.27a} For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collective security, foreshadowed by Bahá’u’lláh and explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. For the first time in history it has been officially recognized and publicly stated that for this system of collective security to be effectively established strength and elasticity are both essential—strength involving the use of an adequate force to ensure the efficacy of the proposed system, and elasticity to enable the machinery that has been devised to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of its aggrieved upholders. For the first time in human history tentative efforts have been exerted by the nations of the world to assume collective responsibility, and to supplement their verbal pledges by actual preparation for collective action. And again, for the first time in history, a movement of public opinion has manifested itself in support of the verdict which the leaders and representatives of nations have pronounced, and for securing collective action in pursuance of such a decision.³⁵⁶⁻¹³

His vision of the significance of this action was not obscured by the apparent failure of the collective sanctions to accomplish their stated objective.

^{356.28} Shoghi Effendi affirmed that the goal of the process by which the League of Nations was established was that of attainment to “. . . the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.”³⁵⁶⁻¹⁴

356-12. WOB, p. 191.

356-13. WOB, pp. 191–92.

356-14. WOB, p. 193.

He elaborated on the details of this process some two decades later in 1947, when the United Nations Organization had replaced the League of Nations and was itself proceeding along the path of development of its powers and functions, with his anticipation that this process: 356.29

. . . must, however long and tortuous the way, lead, through a series of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government and the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Bahá'u'lláh and foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah. ³⁵⁶⁻¹⁵ 356.29a

Distinct from, but closely related to, this process of organizational development has been the emergence of a world consciousness. As long ago as 1931, the Guardian referred to: 356.30

. . . the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society. ³⁵⁶⁻¹⁶ 356.30a

One decade later, he commented that: 356.31

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. ³⁵⁶⁻¹⁷ 356.31a

As humanity was plunged into a world war which Shoghi Effendi described as “the titanic upheaval foreshadowed seventy years ago by the prophetic Pen of Bahá'u'lláh” and as the “long-predicted world-encircling conflagration,” he pointed out to the Bahá'ís that this great conflict was an “essential prerequisite to world unification.” ³⁵⁶⁻¹⁸ 356.32

356-15. CF, p. 33.

356-16. WOB, p. 44.

356-17. PDC, p. 200.

356-18. MUHJ, no. 438.1–7.

Recent Developments:

356.33 In recent years, the House of Justice has taken the opportunity provided by its Ridván messages to draw the attention of the worldwide Bahá'í community to the profound significance of the events occurring in the wider society as humanity exhibits a growing consciousness of the unity of the nations and peoples of the planet.

356.34 Particularly significant are the following passages taken from the October 1985 statement *The Promise of World Peace* addressed to the peoples of the world:

356.34a 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.³⁵⁶⁻¹⁹

356.34b 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

356-19. MUHJ, no. 438.1-7.

Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.³⁵⁶⁻²⁰

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.³⁵⁶⁻²¹

356.34c

The pace of change accelerated as the twentieth century approached its conclusion. In 1996 the House of Justice wrote:

356.35

. . . world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá’í observer, signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations to solving world problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual frequency of the global occasions on which these leaders have gathered since the Holy Year four years ago, such as the one in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, at which the attending heads of state and heads of government asserted their commitment to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have been acting together in responding to a variety of crises in different parts of the world. Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form

356.35a

356-20. MUHJ, no. 438.25–28.

356-21. MUHJ, no. 438.54–55.

of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?³⁵⁶⁻²²

356.36 While in 1998 it commented that:

356.36a . . . amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistakable trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies—a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of an organically unified world.³⁵⁶⁻²³

356.37 Reviewing the significant events which occurred in the world over the past four years, the House of Justice stated at Riḍván 2000 that “world leaders took bold steps towards fashioning the structures of a global political peace” and that:

356.37a . . . attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá’u’lláh’s prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for an international criminal court to be established, another action that accords with Bahá’í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders are scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of communications have opened the way for everyone to communicate with anyone on the planet.³⁵⁶⁻²⁴

356.38 A few months later, in reporting on millennial gatherings held in New York during the year 2000 to address global issues pertaining to peace—the

356-22. See no. 216, pp. 480–95, Riḍván message 153 B.E.

356-23. See no. 263, pp. 612–17, Riḍván message 155 B.E.

356-24. See no. 331, pp. 716–29, 2000 Riḍván message.

Millennium Forum in May, the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August, and the Millennium Summit of the leaders of more than 150 nations held in September—the House of Justice commented, in its message of 24 September 2000, that:

For any observer imbued with the Bahá'í vision of peace and its inherent processes, the substance and implications of these recent events, seen together with previous world conferences that during the last decade also involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed to contemplate. It must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so early a stage in the Bahá'í era, representatives of our international community took part so notably in these occurrences that have set down milestones along the way towards that new World Order so clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh.

356.38a

357

Riḍván Message 2001

RiḌVÁN 2001

To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dearly loved Friends,

With great joy in our hearts and high expectations, we come to this Riḍván season at a change of time, when a new state of mind is evident among us all. Abroad in our world community there is a heightened awareness of the value of process, the necessity of planning and the virtue of systematic action in fostering growth and in developing the human resources by which expansion can be sustained and consolidation assured. The coherence of understanding about these prerequisites of progress cannot be overvalued, nor can the importance of perpetuating them through well-ordered training be overestimated. And so the arrival of our community at such a moment of consciousness is an occasion of significance for us. We are deeply grateful to the Blessed Beauty to be able to recognize and acclaim it at the very beginning of the global enterprise being launched during these festive days.

357.1

The power of will generated by this consciousness characterized the conference of the Continental Counselors and the members of their Auxiliary Boards who gathered last January in the Holy Land. The event produced so illuminating an experience as to signalize the Faith's entry into a new epoch,

357.2

the fifth of its Formative Age. Such a freshness of vitality as was displayed at this historic gathering came to be understood as a manifestation of the rising quality of activity throughout the community. Pursuit during the past year of the essentials for advancing the process of entry by troops confirmed this observation. The path was thus paved for the Five Year Plan, the first venture being entered upon in the Fifth Epoch.

357.3 In augmenting major efforts of the previous Four Year Plan that brought into being more than 300 training institutes, the Twelve Month Plan achieved its purpose. It gathered significance through the notable responses of institutions and individuals to the call for a greater focus on the spiritual nurturing of children and the involvement of junior youth in Bahá'í community life. The training of teachers of children's classes and the inclusion of junior youth in the institute process have become a regular part of Bahá'í activity in a number of countries. Despite its brevity, the Twelve Month Plan had an importance beyond the objectives specifically assigned. The Plan was a dynamic link between a highly eventful epoch in Bahá'í history and the immensely promising prospects of a new one, for which its achievements have so well prepared the community. It has been etched in our annals, too, for the enduring effects of the Faith's activities at the end of the twentieth century—a century that deserves to be reflected upon by any Bahá'í who wishes to understand the tumultuous forces that influenced the life of the planet and the processes of the Cause itself at a crucial time in humanity's social and spiritual evolution. As an aid to so worthy an effort, *Century of Light*, a review of the twentieth century, was prepared at our request and under our supervision.

357.4 On many occasions during this one-year endeavor, the external affairs activities of the Faith were especially visible. Consider, for example, the instances of Bahá'í representatives' having participated prominently in the millennial events that took place in May, August and September at the urging of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The implications of so close and conspicuous an involvement of the Bahá'í International Community with the processes of the Lesser Peace will require the passage of time to be properly understood. Among other highlights was the continental colloquium organized in India by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, a new agency operating under the aegis of the Bahá'í International Community. Adopting the theme of "science, religion and development," the conference featured the participation of leading non-governmental organizations of India, as well as that of institutions of such

renown as UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. In October, the Bahá'í World News Service (BWNS) was launched on the Internet with the intention of reaching both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í audiences with news stories about developments throughout the Bahá'í world.

The intensive activities at the Bahá'í World Center during the last year were, for the most part, made known to the friends through previous reports that included references to such achievements as the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel; the Conference of Continental Counselors and the members of their Auxiliary Boards held in the Holy Land last January; and the completion of the Mount Carmel projects, which are now receiving finishing touches in preparation for the celebratory events in May. Last October, for the first time, pilgrims and visitors were received at the new Reception Center in Haifa, which became fully operational. At Bahjí the embellishment of the sacred site through the development of its gardens has proceeded continually; the effort has, however, received a boost from the new project initiated last year to construct a Visitors' Center towards the northern end of the property beyond the Collins Gate. Scheduled for completion in the next few months, the structure is fully in place, and work is progressing in all areas, including finishing and landscaping. The new facilities will improve the ability of the World Center to receive increasing numbers of pilgrims, short-term Bahá'í visitors, and special guests. 3575

To conclude this summary of the year, we rejoice in informing you that, after the lapse of almost three decades, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Indonesia was restored at the National Convention held in Jakarta last Riḍván. A ban imposed on Bahá'í activities in August 1962 severely restricted the actions of the Indonesian Bahá'ís for all that time, but they remained steadfast and wise in their long-suffering until changed circumstances in that country resulted in the lifting of the ban. May we not venture to hope, then, that a similar happy report concerning our beleaguered coreligionists in Iran, Egypt and other countries will not be too far distant? 3576

Dear Friends: Two decades from now the Bahá'í world will celebrate the centenary of the inception of the Formative Age. We look back at the dawning of the Age from the vantage point of attainments that could hardly have been imagined at the outset. Up ahead are horizons that urgently summon the community to even greater achievements in the short span separating it from that centennial. Those heights can and must be scaled. The Five Year 3577

Plan, to which we call the urgent and sustained attention of the friends throughout the world, is intended to meet this challenge. It constitutes the first of a series of campaigns that will be pursued during these twenty years. This Plan marks the next phase in the aim to accomplish a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It demands an acceleration of this vital process and, furthermore, insists upon continuity in systematic endeavor on the part of its three constituent participants: the individual, the institutions, and the community.

357.8 No need to elaborate on the requirements of the Plan, for these were set out in our message to the assembled Counselors in the Holy Land and subsequently shared with all National Spiritual Assemblies. Soon after their conference, the Counselors began consulting with the National Assemblies about the execution of the Plan in their respective jurisdictions. The Plan's direction is therefore known to the friends everywhere, as regional and local preparations for pursuing its major aim are under way. There is a general awareness by now that efforts will be made to effect a deeper penetration of the Faith into more and more regions within countries. For example, where circumstances permit, local communities that exist in close proximity to each other will be mobilized to participate in intensive programs of growth. Other approaches will require methodical opening of new areas for which homefront pioneers must be raised up in the same consecrated spirit that prompted those who scattered abroad at earlier times to open virgin territories across continents and seas. Suffice it to say that the process animating this divinely driven enterprise will eventually expand as related features are gradually introduced and systematically integrated into its operation.

357.9 A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship, as circumstances in national communities permit. The scheduling of these projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries. This development will unfold throughout successive stages of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. Upon the completion of the Mother Temple of the West, the Guardian started a program of constructing continental temples. The first among these were the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs in Kampala, Sydney and Frankfurt, which were built in response to Ten Year Plan goals. The Universal House of Justice continued along these lines with the building of Temples in Panama City, Apia, and New Delhi. But this continental stage has yet to be completed: one more edifice remains to be built. It is with profound

thankfulness and joy that we announce at this auspicious moment the decision to proceed with this last project. During the Five Year Plan, erection of the Mother Temple of South America in Santiago, Chile, will commence and thus fulfill a wish clearly expressed by Shoghi Effendi.

Meanwhile, the time is propitious that further steps be taken at the World Center to develop the functions of the institutions occupying the new edifices on the Arc. The International Teaching Center having advanced significantly in its work, attention will be given particularly to organizing the work of the Center for the Study of the Texts. Enriching the translations into English from the Holy Texts will be a special object of this attention. The purpose of the institution is to assist the Universal House of Justice in consulting the Sacred Writings and to prepare translations and commentaries on the authoritative texts of the Faith. Moreover, in the Holy Land, a continued effort will be devoted towards the devising of measures to make possible a further increase in the number of pilgrims and visitors to the Bahá'í World Center. 357.10

In our Riḍván message five years ago, we announced the holding of a major event at the World Center to mark the completion of the projects on Mount Carmel and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb to the public. The moment is upon us, and we exult in the anticipation of welcoming friends from virtually all countries to programs that will extend over a five-day period, 21–25 May. We are also happy to say that steps are being taken to connect the Bahá'í world to the proceedings through live transmissions on the World Wide Web and by satellite, about which information is being provided. As the World Center focuses on the preparations, excitement is building up among the public in Haifa, where municipal authorities have undertaken to publish a book entitled *Bahá'í Shrine and Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel: A Visual Journey* to coincide with the event. Moreover, the Israel Postal Authority is pursuing its decision to release at the same time a commemorative stamp featuring the Terraces. The significance of the occasion lies principally in the pause it will allow for a review of the remarkable distance the Cause has covered in its development during the twentieth century. It will be time, too, for considering the future implications of the phenomenal accomplishments symbolized by the rise of the monumental structures on God's holy mountain—a rise that opens the spiritual and administrative centers of our Faith to the gaze of the world. 357.11

As our community rejoices in these thrilling considerations, let every member bear in mind that there is no time for resting on laurels. Human- 357.12

ity's current plight is too desperate to allow for even a moment's hesitation in sharing the Bread of Life, which has come down from heaven in our time. Let there be no delay, then, in advancing the process that has every promise of success in ushering to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts the souls of all that hunger after truth.

^{357.13} May He Who keeps watch over the destiny of His divine System guide and direct and confirm every effort you make towards the realization of the urgent tasks set before you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Glossary

Note: **Boldface** terms within entries are cross-references to other entries that define or amplify essential terms. A number of entries are based on explanations found in “Definitions of Some of the Oriental Terms Used in Bahá’í Literature” in *The Bahá’í World: An International Record, Volume XVIII, 1979–1983*, pp. 897–904. Other entries are based on explanations found in the notes and glossary in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. References to Tablets of the Divine Plan cite Tablet and paragraph numbers, e.g., “TDP 6.8.”

A

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ *Servant of Bahá*: the title assumed by ‘Abbás Effendi (23 May 1844–28 November 1921), eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá’u’lláh and the Center of His Covenant. Upon Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension in 1892, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá became Head of the Bahá’í Faith in accordance with provisions revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Book of the Covenant. Among the titles by which He is known are the Center of the Covenant, the Mystery of God, the Master, and the Perfect Exemplar of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. See **Tablets of the Divine Plan** and **Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**.

ABHÁ *Most Glorious*. See **Alláh-u-Abhá**; **Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá**.

ABHÁ BEAUTY A translation of *Jamál-i-Abhá*, a title of **Bahá’u’lláh**.

ABHÁ KINGDOM *The Most Glorious Kingdom*: the spiritual world beyond this world.

ABHÁ PARADISE See **Abhá Kingdom**.

ADAMIC CYCLE See **Cycle**.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER The international system for the administration of the affairs of the Bahá’í community. Ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, it is the agency through which the spirit of His revelation is to exercise its transforming effects on humanity and through which the **Bahá’í World Commonwealth** will be ushered in. Its twin, crowning institutions are the **Guardianship** and the **Universal House**

of Justice. The institutions that make it up and the principles by which it operates are set forth in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Its structure was further clarified and raised up by Shoghi Effendi during his ministry as Guardian of the Faith (1921–57). This process of elucidation continues through guidance from the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing and legislative body of the Bahá'í Faith, which is supported by National and Local **Spiritual Assemblies** elected by members of the Bahá'í community. These local and national bodies are invested with the authority to direct the Bahá'í community's affairs and to uphold Bahá'í laws and standards. They are also responsible for the education, guidance, and protection of the community. The Administrative Order also comprises the institutions of the **Hands of the Cause of God**, the **International Teaching Center**, and the **Continental Boards of Counselors** and their **Auxiliary Boards** and assistants, who bear particular responsibility for the protection and propagation of the Faith and share with the Spiritual Assemblies the functions of educating, counseling, and advising members of the Bahá'í community. Other institutions of the Administrative Order include **Huqúqu'lláh**, the Bahá'í **Fund**, the **Mashriqu'l-Adhkár**, and the **Nineteen Day Feast**. The present Bahá'í Administrative Order is the precursor of the **World Order of Bahá'u'lláh** and is described by Shoghi Effendi as its “nucleus” and “pattern.”

AFNÁN *Twigs*: the Báb's kindred; specifically, descendants of His three maternal uncles and His wife's two brothers.

AGES The Bahá'í Dispensation is divided into three Ages: the Heroic, Formative, and Golden Ages. The Heroic Age, also called the Apostolic or Primitive Age, began in 1844 with the Declaration of the Báb and spanned the ministries of the Báb (1844–53), Bahá'u'lláh (1852–92), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1892–1921). The transitional event most often identified with the end of the Heroic Age and the beginning of the Formative Age is the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921. The Formative Age, also known as the Age of Transition or the Iron Age, began in 1921 when Shoghi Effendi, according to instructions in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, became the Guardian of the Cause of God and began to build Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order. The Formative Age is the second and current Age; it is to be followed by the third and final Age, the Golden Age destined to witness the proclamation of the Most Great Peace and the establishment of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth. “The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture,” Shoghi Effendi wrote, “—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.” See also **Dispensation; Epochs; Bahá'í World Commonwealth**.

AGHŞĀN *Branches*: the sons and male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh.

'AKKÁ A four-thousand-year-old seaport and prison-city in northern Israel surrounded by fortress-like walls facing the sea. In the mid-1800s 'Akká became a penal colony to which the worst criminals of the Ottoman Empire were sent. In 1868 Bahá'u'lláh and His family and companions were banished to 'Akká by Sulţán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz. Bahá'u'lláh was incarcerated within its barracks for two years, two months, and five days. Restrictions were gradually relaxed, and He lived in a series of houses within 'Akká until June 1877, when He moved outside the city walls to the Mansion of Mazra'ih. Bahá'u'lláh named 'Akká "the Most Great Prison."

ALLĀH-U-ABHĀ *God is Most Glorious*: the **Greatest Name**, adopted as a greeting among Bahá'ís during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's exile in Adrianople (1863–68).

AMATU'L-BAHĀ RŪĤĪYYIH KHĀNUM Née Mary Maxwell (1910–2000), also called Rūĥíyyih Rabbání; daughter of May Bolles Maxwell and Sutherland Maxwell of Montreal, and wife of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. On 26 March 1952, succeeding her illustrious father, she was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land. *Rūĥíyyih* (meaning "spiritual") is a name given to her by Shoghi Effendi on their marriage. *Khānum* is a Persian title meaning "lady," "Madame," or "Mrs." The title *Amatu'l-Bahá* (meaning "Maid-servant of Bahá") was used by the Guardian in a cable to a conference in Chicago in 1953. *Rabbání* is a surname given to Shoghi Effendi by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

ANCIENT BEAUTY A translation of *Jamál-i-Qadím*, a name of God that is also used as a title of Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the latest Manifestation of God to humankind. One cannot always say categorically in any passage whether the reference is to God, to Bahá'u'lláh, or to both.

ANCIENT OF DAYS See **Ancient Beauty**.

APOSTOLIC AGE See **Ages**.

AQDAS *Most Holy*. See **Kitáb-i-Aqdas**, **The**.

ARC The line of a curved path laid out by Shoghi Effendi on Mount Carmel, stretching across the Bahá'í properties near the Shrine of the Báb and centered on the Monument Gardens. On this Arc the seats of the "world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh are to be located (MA, pp. 32–33). Within the Arc are the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf; her brother, the Purest Branch; and her mother, the Most Exalted Leaf. Edifices already constructed on the Arc include the International Bahá'í Archives building (completed in 1957), the seat of the Universal House of

Justice (completed in 1982 and occupied in 1983), the International Teaching Center, and the Center for the Study of the Texts. The International Bahá'í Library has yet to be completed. See also **Administrative Order; World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.**

ARK The word “ark” means, literally, a boat or ship, something that affords protection and safety, or a chest or box. It is used in two senses in the Bible. In the first sense it refers to the Ark of Noah, which He was bidden to build of gopher wood to preserve life during the Flood. In the second sense it refers to the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred chest representing to the Hebrews God's presence among them. It was constructed to hold the Tablets of the Law in Moses' time and was later placed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Ark, as a symbol of God's Law and the Divine Covenant that is the salvation of the people in every age and Dispensation, appears in various ways in the Bahá'í writings. Bahá'u'lláh refers to His faithful followers as “the denizens of the Crimson Ark”; He refers to the Ark of the Cause and also to the Ark of His Laws. A well-known passage in which this term is used appears in the Tablet of Carmel: “Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.” Shoghi Effendi explains that the Ark in this passage refers to the Bahá'í Administrative Center on Mount Carmel and that the dwellers of the Ark are the members of the Universal House of Justice.

ARMY OF LIGHT Generally, the Bahá'í community, but more particularly the “heavenly armies . . . those souls,” according to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “who are entirely freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents” (TDP 8.2).

ÁSÍYIH KHÁNUM *Navváb* (an honorific implying “Grace” or “Highness”); *the Most Exalted Leaf*: wife of Bahá'u'lláh and mother of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahíyyih Khánum, and Mírzá Mihdí. She was married to Bahá'u'lláh in 1835, accompanied Him in His exiles, and died in 1886. Bahá'u'lláh named her His “perpetual consort in all the worlds of God.” Her resting-place is in the Monument Gardens on Mount Carmel, next to the tomb of Mírzá Mihdí and near that of the Greatest Holy Leaf.

AUTHOR OF THE BAHÁ'Í REVELATION Bahá'u'lláh.

AUXILIARY BOARDS An institution established by Shoghi Effendi in 1954 to act as “deputies, assistants and advisers” to the **Hands of the Cause of God** as they carry out their twin duties of protection and propagation. With the formation of the **Continental Boards of Counselors** in 1968, the Hands of the Cause of God were freed of responsibility for appointing, supervising, and coordinating the work of the Auxiliary Boards, and these functions were transferred by the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counselors. There are two Auxiliary Boards, one for protection and one for propagation; members serve on one of the

two boards. In a letter dated 7 October 1973, the Universal House of Justice authorized the appointment of assistants to Auxiliary Board members.

B

BÁB, THE *The Gate*: title assumed by Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad (20 October 1819–9 July 1850) after declaring His mission in Shíráz in 1844. The Báb’s station is twofold: He is a Manifestation of God and the Founder of the Bábí Faith, and He is the Herald of Bahá’u’lláh. A detailed, moving, and authoritative work titled *The Dawn-Breakers* (written by Nabíl-i-Zarandí and translated by Shoghi Effendi) recounts the Báb’s life and His followers’ exploits. See Balyuzi, *The Báb*.

BÁBÍYYIH, THE *The Bábí place or the center of the Bábís*: a house in Mashhad, Iran, that served as a residence for Mullá Ḥusayn (the first of the **Letters of the Living**) and Quddús (also a Letter of the Living, whose rank was second only to that of the Báb) and as a place to which inquirers came to learn about the Bábí Faith. The Bahá’í historian Nabíl writes that “A steady stream of visitors, whom the energy and zeal of Mullá Ḥusayn had prepared for the acceptance of the Faith, poured into the presence of Quddús, acknowledged the claim of the Cause, and willingly enlisted under its banner. The all-observing vigilance with which Mullá Ḥusayn labored to diffuse the knowledge of the new Revelation, and the masterly manner in which Quddús edified its ever-increasing number of adherents, gave rise to a wave of enthusiasm which swept over the entire city of Mashhad, and the effects of which spread rapidly beyond the confines of Khurásán. The house of Bábíyyih was soon converted into a rallying center for a multitude of devotees who were fired with an inflexible resolve to demonstrate, by every means in their power, the great inherent energies of their Faith.” (DB, p. 267)

BAHÁ’Í ELECTIONS See **Elections, Bahá’í**.

BAHÁ’Í FUND See **Fund**.

BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY An international body made up of Bahá’í institutions, local and national, continental and international, all closely interrelated, and comprising the worldwide membership of the Bahá’í Faith. Since 1948 the Bahá’í International Community has been affiliated with the United Nations’ Office of Public Information. In 1967 the Universal House of Justice assumed the function (shouldered for many years by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States) of representing the Bahá’í International Community in its capacity as a nongovernmental organization at the United Nations. In 1970 the Bahá’í International Community was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and in 1976 it became affiliated with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, formerly named the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund). It is also affiliated with the United

Nations Environment Program (UNEP). In its work with the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community participates in meetings of United Nations bodies concerned with such issues as human rights, social development, the status of women, the environment, human settlement, food, science and technology, population, the law of the sea, crime prevention, substance abuse, youth, children, the family, disarmament, and the United Nations University.

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTER The world spiritual and administrative centers of the Bahá'í Faith located in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa in Israel. See also **Arc**; **Administrative Order**.

BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMONWEALTH The future Bahá'í community of nations, Shoghi Effendi explains, that will operate “solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Bahá'u'lláh” and will be animated wholly by His spirit. Its “supreme organ” will be the Universal House of Justice functioning in “the plenitude of its power.” Its advent will “signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth.” It will serve as both “the instrument and the guardian of the Most Great Peace.” Within the Bahá'í World Commonwealth “all nations, races, creeds and classes” will be “closely and permanently united,” and “the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them” will be “definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. 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. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. . . . A world metropolis will act as the nerve center . . . , the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate.” The world commonwealth will include a system of international communication; an international auxiliary language; a world script and literature; a uniform and universal system of currency, weights, and measures; and an integrated economic system with coordinated markets and regulated channels of distribution. See also **World Order of Bahá'u'lláh**.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH *The Glory of God*: title of Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí (12 November 1817–29 May 1892), Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. For accounts of His life, see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*; Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*; and Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*. Bahá'u'lláh is referred to by a variety of titles, including the Promised One of All Ages, the Blessed Beauty, the Blessed Perfection, the Morn of Truth, the Abhá Luminary, the Dayspring of the Most Divine Essence, the Ancient Beauty,

the Ancient Root, the Ancient of Days, the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Mystic Dove, the Sovereign Revealer, the Judge, the Redeemer, the Divine Physician, the Prince of Peace, the Pen of Glory, the Pen of the Most High, the Supreme Pen, the Lord of Hosts, and the Lord of the Age. See also **Book of the Covenant; Hidden Words, The; Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The.**

BAHÍYYIH KHÁNUM *The Greatest Holy Leaf; the Most Exalted Leaf*: saintly daughter of Bahá'u'lláh and outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation (1846–1932). Her death in 1932 marked the final end of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith, which had drawn to a close with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921. A monument erected in her memory symbolizes the Bahá'í World Order; its location is Mount Carmel, within the Arc and in close proximity to the resting-places of her brother, Mírzá Mihdí; her mother, Ásíyih Khánúm; and the wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Munirih Khánúm. Her station as “foremost woman of the Bahá'í Dispensation” and her rank among women are paralleled only by such heroines of previous Dispensations as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fátimih, and Táhirihi. For a compilation of Bahá'í writings about Bahíyyih Khánúm and for some of her own letters, see *Bahíyyih Khánúm: The Greatest Holy Leaf* (1982).

BAHJÍ *Delight, gladness, joy*: the name of the property north of 'Akká where the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is situated and where Bahá'u'lláh lived from 1880 until His ascension in 1892. Its extensive gardens were created by Shoghi Effendi and expanded by the Universal House of Justice. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí is the **Qiblih** of the Bahá'í world.

BAYÁN *Exposition, explanation, lucidity, eloquence, utterance*: the title given by the Báb to two of His major works, one in Persian, the other in Arabic. It is also used sometimes to denote the entire body of His writings.

B.E. Bahá'í Era: denotes the nineteen-month Badí' calendar, which is reckoned from 21 March 1844, the year of the Báb's declaration of His mission.

BEST BELOVED See **Ancient Beauty**.

BLESSED BEAUTY A translation of *Jamál-i-Mubárák*, a title of Bahá'u'lláh. See also **Ancient Beauty**.

BLESSED PERFECTION A translation of *Jamál-i-Mubárák*, a title of Bahá'u'lláh. See also **Ancient Beauty**.

BOOK OF THE COVENANT A translation of *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (sometimes referred to as *Kitáb-i-'Ahdí*, meaning “the Book of My Covenant”): Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament, designated by Him as His “Most Great Tablet” and alluded to by Him as the “Crimson Book.” The last Tablet revealed before His ascension, it was writ-

ten in His own hand and entrusted, shortly before His passing, to His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In it Bahá'u'lláh clearly designates 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor and as the Center of His **Covenant**, providing for the continuation of divine authority over the affairs of the Faith in the future.

C

CARMEL See **Mount Carmel**.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS The seat of an institution of Bahá'í scholars, 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.

CENTER OF THE COVENANT A title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to His appointment by Bahá'u'lláh as the successor to whom all must turn after Bahá'u'lláh's passing. See also **Covenant**; **Book of the Covenant**.

CENTRAL FIGURES A collective reference to Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith; the Báb, Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and Founder of the Bábí Faith; and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, authorized Interpreter of the Bahá'í writings.

CHIEF STEWARDS See **Hands of the Cause of God**.

CITY OF THE COVENANT A title designated to New York City by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where he unveiled for Western believers the authority given to him by Bahá'u'lláh for the definitive interpretation of His Revelation.

COMMUNITY OF THE MOST GREAT NAME The Bahá'í community. See also **Greatest Name**.

CONCOURSE ON HIGH The company of holy souls of the spiritual world.

CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE A document adopted by the Universal House of Justice on 26 November 1972. It consists of two parts: the Declaration of Trust, which sets forth the origins and duties of the Universal House of Justice, and the By-Laws, which specify the terms under which the Universal House of Justice operates and define its relationship to other institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

CONSULTATION In Bahá'í usage, a technical term referring to the process of collective decision-making. The aim of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at the best solution or to uncover the truth of a matter. Among the requisites for consultation that are set out in the Bahá'í writings are love, harmony, purity of motive, humil-

ity, lowliness, patience, and long-suffering. Individuals not only have the right to express their views, but they are expected to express them fully and with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation. If unanimity is not achieved, decisions are arrived at by majority vote. Once a decision is reached, all parties, having had the opportunity to express their views fully, are to work together wholeheartedly to implement it. If the decision is wrong, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, through unity the truth will become evident and "the wrong made right."

CONTINENTAL BOARDS OF COUNSELORS An institution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order established by the Universal House of Justice in 1968 to extend into the future the functions of protection and propagation of the Faith assigned to the Hands of the Cause of God by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. Its members are appointed to five-year terms by the Universal House of Justice and serve in five zones—Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe. The International Teaching Center coordinates the work of the Continental Boards of Counselors, who are assisted in their work by Auxiliary Board members, whom they appoint and supervise. See also **Auxiliary Boards; Hands of the Cause of God; International Teaching Center.**

CONTINENTAL FUND See **Fund.**

CONTINENTAL PIONEER COMMITTEES Responsible for gathering and supplying information for and about pioneers and international traveling teachers. Their work complements the functions of the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. There are five such committees: one each for Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe. Members are appointed by the Universal House of Justice; their work is directed by the International Teaching Center.

COVENANT Generally, an agreement or contract between two or more people, usually formal, solemn, and binding. The Universal House of Justice explains, in a letter dated 23 March 1975, that a religious covenant is "a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behavior in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way." The Universal House of Justice also explains that there are two types of religious covenant: "There is . . . the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent." In the Bahá'í Dispensation the Greater Covenant refers to the renewal of God's ancient Covenant through the appearance

of the twin Manifestations of God, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the promise of another Manifestation to come in the future after the passage of at least one thousand years. The Lesser Covenant, in this case, refers to Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with His followers, which establishes 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant. It confers upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá the authority to interpret Bahá'u'lláh's writings in order "to perpetuate the influence" of the Faith and to "insure its integrity, safeguard it from schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion." The Lesser Covenant also establishes the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

COVENANT-BREAKER A Bahá'í who attempts to disrupt the unity of the Faith by defying and opposing the authority of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this Age, or His appointed successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or after Him, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís who continue, despite remonstrances, to violate the Covenant are expelled from the Faith by the Universal House of Justice. This provision preserves the unity of the Faith, which is essential to achieving its cardinal purpose of unifying humankind. It also preserves the purity of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings from the disruptive influence of egoistic individuals who, in past Dispensations, have been responsible for dividing every religion into sects, disrupting its mission, and frustrating to a large degree the intention of its Founder. See also **Covenant**.

CRADLE OF THE FAITH Iran, the homeland of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths and of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

CRUSADE, TEN YEAR WORLD The international teaching plan inaugurated by Shoghi Effendi in 1953 and completed in 1963, some six years after his death. It was the first global plan in which all national Bahá'í communities pursued their respective goals in one coordinated effort. It culminated with the first election of the Universal House of Justice at Riḍván 1963.

CYCLE A unit of time comprising the Dispensations of numerous consecutive Manifestations of God. For example, the Adamic, or Prophetic, Cycle began with Adam and ended with the Dispensation of Muḥammad. The Bahá'í Cycle began with the Báb and is to last at least five hundred thousand years.

D

DANIEL'S PROPHECY The prophecy contained in Daniel 12:12: "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days." 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments in a Tablet to a Kurdish Bahá'í, "Now concerning the verse in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask. . . . These days must be reckoned as solar and not lunar years. For according to this calculation a century will have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be

firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains in the same Tablet that the 1,335 years must be reckoned from 622 A.D., the year of Muḥammad's flight from Mecca to Medina.

Shoghi Effendi associates Daniel's reference to the 1,335 days and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about the prophecy with the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission in 1863 and with the worldwide triumph of the Faith. He stressed that the prophecy refers to occurrences within the Bahá'í community, rather than to events in the outside world.

While Shoghi Effendi clearly allied the Faith's triumph with the successful completion of the third teaching plan to be undertaken by the Bahá'ís, in his letters and in those written on his behalf, four specific dates are mentioned as marking the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy: 1953, 1957, 1960, and 1963. Regarding the year 1960 (derived by a lunar reckoning), Shoghi Effendi anticipated, in *God Passes By*, p. 151, and in a number of his letters, the successful completion of a third Seven Year Plan that was to be inaugurated. Had there been a third Seven Year Plan, it would have concluded in 1960, one hundred lunar years after Bahá'u'lláh's declaration. When the Ten Year Crusade (1953–63) was announced in 1952, Shoghi Effendi linked its completion with the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. There are also several references in letters written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf that give 1957 as the date of the prophecy's fulfillment. In still other letters Shoghi Effendi allies the "hundred lunar years" after Bahá'u'lláh's declaration with the year 1953, although the significance of this hundred years is unclear.

Thus it seems the prophecy is not fulfilled by a single date but, rather, by a process that extended over a period of time. A letter dated 7 March 1955 written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf says, "In the Ten Year Crusade, we are actually fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel, because with the completion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963 we will have established the Faith in every part of the globe." Thus the fulfillment of the prophecy coincided with the period of the Ten Year Crusade, a span of time that included 1953, 1957, 1960, and 1963.

DAWN-BREAKERS The Bábís and early Bahá'ís, many of whom gave their lives as martyrs.

DAWNING PLACE OF REVELATION A title of Bahá'u'lláh, or of any **Manifestation of God**.

DAY OF THE COVENANT 26 November, the day 'Abdu'l-Bahá selected for commemorating the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. The Bahá'ís wished to celebrate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birthday, but He did not want this because it coincides with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb (23 May), when all attention should be given to that sacred event. He gave them instead the Day of the Covenant to celebrate, choosing a date that is six Gregorian months away from the commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension. See also **Covenant**.

DAY OF GOD An expression used variously, according to context, to refer to the appearance of a Manifestation of God, to the duration of His life on earth, or to the duration of His Dispensation. It is also used to refer specifically to the advent of Bahá'u'lláh.

DAY OF JUDGMENT The time of the appearance of the Manifestation of God, when the true character of souls is judged according to their response to His Revelation. Also known as the Day of Resurrection.

DAYSPRING OF DIVINE GUIDANCE Bahá'u'lláh.

DISPENSATION The period of time during which the laws and teachings of a Prophet of God have spiritual authority. For example, the Dispensation of Jesus Christ lasted until the beginning of the Muḥammadan Dispensation, usually fixed at the year 622 A.D., the year Muḥammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. The Islamic Dispensation lasted until the advent of the Báb in 1844. The Dispensation of the Báb ended when Bahá'u'lláh experienced the intimation of His mission in the Siyáh-Chál, the subterranean dungeon in Tehran in which He was imprisoned between August and December 1852. The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh will last until the advent of the next Manifestation of God, which Bahá'u'lláh asserts will occur in no less than one thousand years.

DIVINE ESSENCE God.

DIVINE PEN A title of Bahá'u'lláh.

DIVINE PLAN The Plan for the dissemination of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world, conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and entrusted to the Bahá'ís of North America in fourteen letters called the Tablets of the Divine Plan. The Divine Plan was implemented by Shoghi Effendi and is pursued today under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Teaching Plans undertaken within the framework of the Divine Plan include the first Seven Year Plan (1937–44); the second Seven Year Plan (1946–53) pursued at first by the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada and extended by supplementary plans adopted with the approval or at the behest of Shoghi Effendi by the British Isles, Egypt and the Sudan, Germany, India, Iran, and Iraq; and the Ten Year World Crusade (1953–63), all of which were inaugurated by Shoghi Effendi, and the Nine, Five, Seven, Six, Three, Four Year, and Twelve Month Plans launched by the Universal House of Justice. The Divine Plan is divided into epochs. The first epoch included the years 1937–46; the second epoch spanned the years 1946–63; the third epoch ranged from 1963–86; and the fourth epoch was from 1986–2001. See also **Crusade, Ten Year World; Epochs; Plans; Tablets of the Divine Plan.**

DIVINE THRESHOLD See **Sacred Threshold.**

E

ELECTIONS, BAHÁ'Í Elections conducted according to Bahá'í principles to select individuals to serve as members of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice. Elections for Local Spiritual Assemblies are generally held on 21 April, the first day of the Ríḍván Festival (21 April–2 May), but in certain circumstances can be held on any day during Ríḍván. Elections for National Spiritual Assemblies are held annually during Ríḍván. Elections for the Universal House of Justice are held every five years. All adult members in good standing in a Bahá'í community may vote for the members of their Local Spiritual Assembly; Bahá'ís in an electoral unit elect one or more delegates who, in turn, elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly at the national convention. The members of the National Spiritual Assemblies elect the members of the Universal House of Justice at an international convention. Shoghi Effendi advises electors “to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.” There are no nominations. Campaigning and electioneering are forbidden. Ballots are cast in a prayerful atmosphere, and the nine persons receiving the most votes are considered chosen by God. Members of a minority race or group are given preference when tied for the ninth position; otherwise, ballots are cast to break the tie. A unique and significant aspect of all Bahá'í elections is the fact that voters elect with the understanding that they are free to choose whomever their consciences prompt them to select, and they freely accept the authority of the outcome.

EPISTLE A formal or elegant letter or treatise; a composition in the form of a letter. In Bahá'í usage it refers to certain writings of Bahá'u'lláh—for example, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

EPOCHS Major units of time used to mark the unfoldment of the **Divine Plan** and the Formative Age. The first epoch of the Formative Age (1921–46) began with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 and ended with the conclusion of the first Seven Year Plan pursued by the Bahá'ís of North America under Shoghi Effendi's direction. The second epoch of the Formative Age (1946–63) began with the launching of the second Seven Year Plan and the adoption of similar plans by other national communities throughout the Bahá'í world and ended with the conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade and the election of the Universal House of Justice. The third epoch of the Formative Age (1963–86) included the Nine, Five, and Seven Year Plans formulated by the Universal House of Justice. The fourth epoch of the Formative Age (1986–2001), included the Six, Three, Four Year, and Twelve Month Plans from the Universal House of Justice, as well as the commemoration for the centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. See also **Ages**.

F

FAST, THE A nineteen-day period (2–21 March, the Bahá'í month of 'Alá, or Loftiness) of spiritual renewal and development during which Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. A symbol of self-restraint, the Fast is a time of meditation, prayer, and spiritual recuperation and readjustment.

FEAST See **Nineteen Day Feast**.

FIRESIDE An informal Bahá'í gathering held for the purpose of discussing the Bahá'í Faith and sharing its teachings.

FOLLOWERS OF THE GREATEST NAME Bahá'ís; followers of **Bahá'u'lláh**. See also **Greatest Name**.

FORMATIVE AGE See **Ages**.

FRIENDS Bahá'ís.

FUND The institution of the Bahá'í Fund, of which there are four main funds, operates on the international, continental, national, and local levels.

The Bahá'í International Fund is administered by the Universal House of Justice and is used to support the work of the Faith at the Bahá'í World Center and to sustain national communities unable to meet their own expenses. The International Deputization Fund, a subsidiary of the Bahá'í International Fund, supports the work of pioneers and traveling teachers and is administered by the International Teaching Center. The Persian Relief Fund, originally established by the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran to assist victims of persecution by the Islamic Republic, is also a subsidiary of the Bahá'í International Fund and is administered by the Universal House of Justice.

The Continental Bahá'í Fund supports the work of the Continental Boards of Counselors and the work of their Auxiliary Boards.

Each National Spiritual Assembly and Local Spiritual Assembly administers its own National and Local Fund, respectively.

The funds of the Bahá'í Faith are managed according to principles laid down by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Foremost among the principles are: (1) Except for the portion of the Bahá'í Funds devoted exclusively to charitable, philanthropic, or humanitarian purposes, contributions are accepted only from those who have identified themselves with the Bahá'í Faith and are regarded as its avowed and unreserved supporters. (2) Contributing to the Funds is both a spiritual privilege and a responsibility. (3) All contributions to the Bahá'í Funds are voluntary. (4) The degree of sacrifice and love of the contributor is more important than the amount given. (5) Appeals for donations must be dignified and general in character. (6) Confidentiality of contributions is to be strictly preserved. (7)

Receipts are to be issued. Shoghi Effendi referred to the Funds as “the life-blood” of the Bahá’í institutions.

G

GOD’S HOLY MOUNTAIN See **Mount Carmel**.

GOD’S MAJOR PLAN See **Major Plan of God**.

GOD’S MINOR PLAN See **Minor Plan of God**.

GOLDEN AGE See **Ages**.

GREATEST HOLY LEAF See **Bahíyyih Khánum**.

GREATEST NAME The name Bahá’u’lláh (“the Glory of God”) and its derivatives, such as Alláh-u-Abhá (“God is Most Glorious”), *Bahá* (“glory,” “splendor,” or “light”), and Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá (“O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!”). Also referred to as the Most Great Name.

GUARDIANSHIP The institution, anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, to which Shoghi Effendi was appointed. Shoghi Effendi explains that the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice constitute the twin pillars of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh and are the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Guardian’s chief functions are to interpret the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and to be the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice. See also **Shoghi Effendi**.

H

HANDS OF THE CAUSE OF GOD Eminent Bahá’ís appointed by Bahá’u’lláh to stimulate the propagation and ensure the protection of the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament conferred authority on the Guardian to appoint Hands of the Cause and specified their duties. Shoghi Effendi, in a message dated October 1957 to the Bahá’í world, called the Hands of the Cause of God “the Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth.” After his death on 4 November 1957 the Hands of the Cause of God assumed responsibility for preserving the unity of the Bahá’í Faith and for guiding the Bahá’í world community to the victorious completion of the Ten Year World Crusade planned by Shoghi Effendi. They also called for the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963 and requested the friends not to elect them, leaving them free to discharge their own specific responsibilities. Following the formation of the Universal House of Justice, five Hands of the Cause of God were selected by fellow Hands of the Cause to serve at the Bahá’í World Center, while the rest continued their continental responsibilities.

ties, which included overseeing the work of the Auxiliary Board members. Finding itself unable to appoint or legislate in order to appoint additional Hands of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice, in a cable dated 21 June 1968 and a letter dated 24 June 1968, announced the establishment of the institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors to extend the functions of the Hands of the Cause of God into the future. The Hands of the Cause of God were then freed of responsibility for directing the work of Auxiliary Board members and were all given worldwide responsibilities. See also **Auxiliary Boards; Continental Boards of Counselors; International Teaching Center.**

HAZÍRATU'L-QUDS *The Sacred Fold*: official title designating the headquarters of Bahá'í administrative activity in a particular country or region.

HEROIC AGE See **Ages.**

HIDDEN WORDS, THE Bahá'u'lláh's most important ethical work. Revealed circa 1858. Described by Shoghi Effendi as a “marvelous collection of gem-like utterances . . . with which Bahá'u'lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris.” Originally designated “The Hidden Book of Fáṭimih,” the title of this work is an allusion to the Muslim tradition that the Angel Gabriel revealed a Book to Fáṭimih to console her following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, her Father, and that this Book remained hidden in the spiritual worlds thereafter.

HOLY DAY A day commemorating a significant Bahá'í anniversary or feast. The nine Bahá'í holy days on which work should be suspended include:

The Feast of **Naw-Rúz** (New Year), 21 March

The first day of **Riḍván**, 21 April

The ninth day of Riḍván, 29 April

The twelfth day of Riḍván, 2 May

The anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, 23 May

The anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, 29 May

The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb, 9 July

The anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, 20 October

The anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, 12 November

The **Day of the Covenant**, 26 November, and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 28 November, are commemorated annually, but are not days on which work is to be suspended.

HOLY PLACES Sites in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Israel that are associated with significant events in the lives of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

HOLY SHRINES See **Shrine**.

HOLY TEXTS See **Sacred Scriptures**.

HOLY THRESHOLD See **Sacred Threshold**.

HOSTS ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that “The blessed Person of the Promised One [Bahá’u’lláh] is interpreted in the Holy Book as the Lord of Hosts—the heavenly armies. By heavenly armies those souls are intended who are entirely freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents” (TDP 8.2).

HOUSE OF ‘ABDU’LLÁH PÁSHÁ The house in ‘Akká that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rented in 1896 and that served as His residence until He moved to Haifa in 1910.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP See **Mashriqu’l-Adhkár**.

ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH *The Right of God*: one of the fundamental Bahá’í ordinances of the Bahá’í Faith, it is a great law and a sacred institution laid down by Bahá’u’lláh in the 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. Its far-reaching ramifications extend from enabling individuals to express their devotion to God in a private act of conscience that attracts divine blessings and bounties for the individual, promotes the common good, and directly connects individuals with the Central Institution of the Faith, to buttressing the authority and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. The law prescribes that each Bahá’í shall pay a certain portion of his accumulated savings after the deduction of all expenses and of certain exempt properties such as one’s residence. These payments provide a fund at the disposition of the Head of the Faith for carrying out beneficent activities. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is administered by the Universal House of Justice, and payments are made to trustees appointed by the Universal House of Justice in every country or region. 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. The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh are promulgated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are found in other writings of Bahá’u’lláh and in those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. The law was codified in 1987 and made universally applicable as of Ridván 1992 to all who profess belief in Bahá’u’lláh. For further information, see *Ḥuqúqu’lláh: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and The Universal House of Justice* (1986).

I

INSTITUTE See **training institute**.

INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES An institution at the Bahá'í World Center that preserves the writings and sacred relics of the Central Figures of the Faith and Shoghi Effendi as well as other historical documents and items. The International Archives Building, completed in 1957, was the first of five buildings on the Arc on Mount Carmel to be constructed.

INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í CONVENTION An event held every five years in Haifa, Israel, at which members of National Spiritual Assemblies from around the world gather to elect the members of the Universal House of Justice.

INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í LIBRARY The central depository of all literature published on the Faith, and 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.

INTERNATIONAL FUND See **Fund**.

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER An institution established by the Universal House of Justice in 1973, the members of which are the Hands of the Cause of God and Counselors appointed by the Universal House of Justice to serve at the Bahá'í World Center. Among the institution's many responsibilities are making reports and recommendations to the Universal House of Justice, coordinating and directing the work of the Continental Boards of Counselors, being fully informed of the Faith's condition throughout the world, watching over the security and ensuring the protection of the Faith, and being alert to possibilities for extending the teaching work and for developing social and economic life both inside and outside the Bahá'í community.

K

KING OF GLORY A title of **Bahá'u'lláh**.

KITÁB-I-'AHD See **Book of the Covenant**.

KITÁB-I-AQDAS, THE *The Most Holy Book* (*Kitáb* means "book"; *Aqdas* means "Most Holy"): the chief repository of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and the Mother Book of His revelation, revealed in 'Akká in 1873 and termed by Shoghi Effendi "the Charter of the future world civilization." For a summary of its contents, see GPB, pp. 214–15.

KNIGHTS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH The title given by Shoghi Effendi to Bahá'ís who settled in the goal countries enumerated at the outset of the Ten Year World Crusade as having no Bahá'ís living in them. All those who settled in such territories

during the Holy Year October 1952–October 1953 and, thereafter, the first to settle in the remaining territories were designated Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. The names of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh are inscribed on a scroll that was laid beneath the floor inside the entrance door of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in May 1992 during the Holy Year commemorating the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension.

L

LESSER PEACE The first of two major stages in which Bahá'ís believe peace will be established. The Lesser Peace will come about through a binding treaty among the nations for the political unification of the world. It will involve fixing every nation's boundaries, strictly limiting the size of their armaments, laying down the principles underlying the relations among governments, and ascertaining all international agreements and obligations. Its inception will synchronize with two processes operating within the Bahá'í Faith—the maturation of local and national Bahá'í institutions and the completion of specified buildings around the **Arc** on Mount Carmel—and will portend the coming of the **Most Great Peace**.

LETTERS OF THE LIVING A translation of *Ḥurúf-i-Ḥáyy*. The first eighteen people who independently recognized and believed in the Báb. Together with Him, they form the first *Váḥid* (“Unit”) of the Bábí Dispensation. The word *Ḥáyy*, which is the Name of God “The Living,” has the numerical value of eighteen in the *abjad* system of notation in which each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a specific numerical value. The word “Váḥid” has the numerical value of nineteen.

LIFEBLOOD OF THE CAUSE The Bahá'í **Fund**.

LORD OF HOSTS A title of **Bahá'u'lláh**. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains that “what is meant in the prophecies by the ‘Lord of Hosts’ and the ‘Promised Christ’ is the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] and His holiness the Exalted One [the Báb].” See also **Hosts**.

LORD OF THE AGE A designation of the Manifestation of God in each Dispensation. In Islam it was a title given to the promised Qá'im and, therefore, is applied in Bahá'í terminology particularly to the Báb.

M

MAJOR PLAN OF GOD God's plan for humanity that is tumultuous and mysterious in its progress. Its purpose in this cycle is to unify the human race and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. See also **Minor Plan of God**.

MANIFESTATION OF GOD Designation of a Prophet “endowed with constancy” Who is the Founder of a religious Dispensation, inasmuch as in His words, His

person, and His actions He manifests the nature and purpose of God in accordance with the capacity and needs of the people to whom He comes.

MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR *The Dawning-place of the Praise of God*: a title designating a Bahá'í House of Worship or Temple. Houses of Worship have been constructed in Wilmette, near Chicago, Illinois; Kampala, Uganda; Ingleside, near Sydney, Australia; Langenhain, near Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Panama City, Panama; Apia, Western Samoa; and New Delhi, India. The first Bahá'í House of Worship, built in 1902 in 'Ishqábád, Turkmenistan, was damaged by an earthquake in 1948 and, following heavy rains, had to be razed in 1963. For a full description of the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, see BW 18:568–88.

MASTER A title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to the virtues He manifested and to His role as an enduring model for humanity to emulate.

MAZRA'IH A country mansion near the village of Mazra'a, several miles north of the prison-city of 'Akká and about a half-mile from the Mediterranean Sea. Bahá'u'lláh lived at Mazra'ih for about two years after leaving 'Akká in 1877. The mansion looks eastward to the hills of Galilee and has a pool and gardens.

MECCA The holy city of Islam, the birthplace of Muḥammad (570 A.D.). In Mecca, the principal place of pilgrimage of the Muslim world, stands the Great Mosque surrounding the Ka'bih (Kaaba), the ancient cubical temple believed to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael, which is the Muslim **Qiblih**.

MIHDÍ, MÍRZÁ *The Purest Branch*: a son of Bahá'u'lláh and brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He died at the age of twenty-two in 1870 when he fell through a skylight while rapt in prayer on the roof of the prison-barracks in 'Akká. He asked Bahá'u'lláh to accept his life as a ransom so that pilgrims prevented from attaining Bahá'u'lláh's presence would be enabled to do so. Bahá'u'lláh, in a prayer, made this astounding proclamation: "Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Thou seest Me in the hands of Mine enemies, and My son blood-stained before Thy face, O Thou in Whose hands is the kingdom of all names. I have, O My Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be united."

MINOR PLAN OF GOD The part of God's Plan that is revealed by Bahá'u'lláh to His followers and is laid out for them in detailed instructions and successive plans by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. In contrast to the **Major Plan of God**, it proceeds in a methodical, ordered way, disseminating His teachings and raising up the structure of a united world society.

MOST EXALTED LEAF See **Ásíyih Khánum** and **Bahíyyih Khánum**.

MOST GREAT FESTIVAL See **Riḍván**.

MOST GREAT JUBILEE The centenary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic mission in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad, 22 April–3 May 1863. It was commemorated by the first Bahá'í World Congress, held in Royal Albert Hall, London, during the Riḍván Festival (28 April–2 May) 1963. The Most Great Jubilee coincided with the victorious completion of the Ten Year World Crusade Shoghi Effendi launched in April 1953 (fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 12:12 regarding the spread of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world) and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice elected a few days earlier in Haifa, Israel. See also **Daniel's Prophecy**.

MOST GREAT NAME See **Greatest Name**.

MOST GREAT OCEAN See **Ancient Beauty**.

MOST GREAT PEACE The second of two major stages in which Bahá'ís believe peace will be established. The Most Great Peace will be the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes, and nations. It will rest on the foundation of, and be preserved by, the ordinances of God. See also **Lesser Peace**.

MOST GREAT PRISON The prison-city of 'Akká in which Bahá'u'lláh, His family, and companions were confined from 31 August 1868 until June 1877.

MOST HOLY BOOK See **Kitáb-i-Aqdas**, **The**.

MOST HOLY SHRINE The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in **Bahjí**.

MOTHER TEMPLE Refers to the first Bahá'í House of Worship to be built in a hemisphere or continent. For example, the Bahá'í House of Worship outside of Frankfurt am Main, Germany, is known as the Mother Temple of Europe; the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, the Mother Temple of the West.

MOUNT CARMEL A mountain in Israel on which the Shrine of the Báb and the Bahá'í World Center are located. The home of the prophet Elijah, it is referred to by Bahá'u'lláh as “the Hill of God and His Vineyard” and was extolled by Isaiah as the “mountain of the Lord” to which “all nations shall flow.” On it Bahá'u'lláh pitched His tent and revealed the **Tablet of Carmel**, the charter of the world spiritual and administrative centers of the Bahá'í Faith. See also **Arc**; **Bahá'í World Center**.

MYSTERY OF GOD A translation of *Sirru'lláh*, a title Bahá'u'lláh gave to 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to His unique spiritual station in which the incompatible character-

istics of human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection are blended and completely harmonized.

N

NATIONAL CONVENTION The institution that elects the members of the National Spiritual Assembly during the annual Riḍvān Festival (April 21–May 2). At unit or “district” conventions, adult Bahá’ís elect delegates who, in turn, attend the National Convention. There the delegates vote to elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, consult about the affairs of the Faith, and offer recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly. See also **Elections, Bahá’í**.

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES See **Spiritual Assemblies**.

NAW-RÚZ *New Day*: Bahá’í New Year’s Day, the date of the vernal equinox. A Bahá’í holy day on which work is suspended, it is celebrated in the West on 21 March, until such time as the Universal House of Justice fixes the standard for the date throughout the world in accordance with astronomical data.

NIGHTINGALE OF PARADISE See **Ancient Beauty**.

NINE YEAR PLAN The first teaching plan launched by the Universal House of Justice. It encompassed the years 1964–73. See also **Plans**.

NINETEEN DAY FEAST A Bahá’í institution inaugurated by the Báb and confirmed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It is held on the first day of every Bahá’í month, each consisting of nineteen days and bearing the name of one of the attributes of God. The Feast is the heart of Bahá’í community life at the local level and consists of devotional, consultative, and social elements.

O

ORDER OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH See **World Order of Bahá’u’lláh**.

P

PEERLESS BELOVED See **Ancient Beauty**.

PEN OF GLORY, PEN OF THE MOST HIGH See **Ancient Beauty**.

PEOPLE OF BAHÁ Generally, the members of the Bahá’í community. Shoghi Effendi explains that in the Tablet of Carmel “the people of Bahá” refers to the members of the Universal House of Justice.

PILGRIM HOUSE A house for visiting pilgrims that Mírzá Ja‘far Raḥmání built, with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s permission, near the Shrine of the Báb. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá composed a dedicatory inscription that appears above its entrance: “This is a spiritual Hostel for Pilgrims, and its founder is Mírzá Ja‘far Raḥmání 1327 A.H. [1909].” It was completed in 1909 and was known as the Eastern or Oriental Pilgrim House. In 1969 the increasing number of pilgrims led the Universal House of Justice to decide that pilgrims should be accommodated in hotels, thereby enabling it to convert the pilgrim house into a reception center.

A Western Pilgrim House was built across the street from the House of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa, shortly after His passing, with funds American Bahá’ís had contributed and in accordance with a design ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had selected and modified. In 1963 the Universal House of Justice established its offices in the Western Pilgrim House. In 1983, after the completion of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the Western Pilgrim House became the seat of the International Teaching Center.

Another pilgrim house is located at Bahjí, near the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh.

PILGRIMAGE A journey made with the intention of visiting a shrine or holy place. For Bahá’ís it is both a privilege and an obligation, although it is only obligatory for men who are able to make the journey. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh specifically ordains pilgrimage to the House of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad and to the House of the Báb in Shíráz. On the day of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension, the room where His Holy Dust was laid became a third center of pilgrimage—the most holy spot and the **Qiblih** of the Bahá’í world—for at least the next thousand years. Under current conditions, Bahá’ís assume that the obligation of pilgrimage is satisfied by a visit to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and the Shrine of the Báb in the Holy Land.

The first group of Western pilgrims arrived in ‘Akká on 10 December 1898 and included Edward and Lua Getsinger; Phoebe Hearst; Mrs. Hearst’s butler, Robert Turner, who was the first African-American in the West to become a Bahá’í; and Mrs. Thornburgh.

PILLARS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE National Spiritual Assemblies. See also **Spiritual Assemblies**.

PIONEERS Bahá’ís who leave their hometown or country to reside elsewhere for the purpose of teaching the Bahá’í Faith.

PLANS Refers to the courses of action devised by Shoghi Effendi and, later, by the Universal House of Justice for expanding and consolidating the Bahá’í Faith within the framework of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s **Divine Plan**. Teaching Plans launched by Shoghi Effendi include the first Seven Year Plan (1937–44) and the second Seven Year Plan (1946–53) pursued by the Bahá’ís of the United States; a Six Year Plan pursued by the Bahá’ís of the British Isles (1944–50); plans of varying durations separately pursued between 1947–53 by the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada, of Central

America, of South America, of Australia and New Zealand, of India, Pakistan, and Burma, of Germany and Austria, of Iran, of Iraq, and of Egypt and the Sudan; the Two Year Plan for the development of the Faith in Africa; and the Ten Year World Crusade (1953–63) pursued by the worldwide Bahá'í community. The Universal House of Justice has launched the Nine Year Plan (1964–73), the Five Year Plan (1974–79), the Seven Year Plan (1979–86), the Six Year Plan (1986–92), the Three Year Plan (1993–1996), the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the Twelve Month Plan (2000–2001), and two Five Year Plans (2001–2006 and 2006–2011). See also **Major Plan of God** and **Minor Plan of God**.

PROMISED ONE Bahá'u'lláh.

PUREST BRANCH, THE See **Mihdí, Mírzá.**

Q

QIBLIH “*That which one faces; prayer-direction; point of adoration*”: the focus to which the faithful turn in prayer. The Qiblih for Muslims is the Ka'bah in **Mecca**; for Bahá'ís it is the Most Holy Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh at **Bahjí**, “the Heart and Qiblih of the Bahá'í world.”

R

REGIONAL COUNCILS Established by the Universal House of Justice in 1997, this new element of the Bahá'í **Administrative Order**, serves as a link between the local and national levels. These institutions are formed only in certain countries where the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies requires this development. A Regional Council is established either through election by the members of the **Local Spiritual Assemblies** in a region or through appointment by the **National Spiritual Assembly**.

REMOTE PRISON The city of Adrianople (now Edirne, Turkey), to which Bahá'u'lláh was banished from 12 December 1863 through 12 August 1868. Adrianople is in western Turkey, on its border with Greece and Bulgaria.

REVELATION The conveying of truth from God to humanity. The word is used to refer to the process of divine communication from God to His Manifestation and from the Manifestation to His people; to the words and acts of such communication themselves; and to the entire body of teachings given by a Prophet of God.

RIDVÁN The Islamic name of the gardener and custodian of Paradise. In Bahá'í terminology the word denotes both “garden” and “paradise”; however, it has also been used to denote God's good-pleasure and His divine acceptance. The Ridván Festival, the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í festivals, commemorates

Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission to His companions in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad in 1863. It is a twelve-day period celebrated annually, 21 April–2 May. It is also called the Most Great Festival. During each Riḍván Festival Local and National Spiritual Assemblies are elected, and, once every five years, the Universal House of Justice is elected.

RUHI INSTITUTE A system whose materials seek to integrate focused study of the Bahá'í writings with specific acts of service for the community. Organized as a series of levels of study, which aim to develop an understanding of the essential spiritual verities taught by Bahá'u'lláh, the courses are self-perpetuating in nature, developing human resources who in turn are able to arise to serve the community and teach the courses to others.

RUḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM, AMATU'L-BAHÁ See **Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum**.

S

SACRED SCRIPTURES, SACRED TEXTS The Holy Books of the world's religions. Also refers to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

SACRED THRESHOLD A term used metaphorically and respectfully to denote approach to the Presence of God and, hence, to the precincts of a holy place such as a shrine. It is also sometimes used literally to denote the actual outer or inner threshold of a holy shrine.

SEAL OF THE PROPHETS Muḥammad.

SHOGHI EFFENDI The title by which Shoghi Rabbání (1 March 1897–4 November 1957), great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, is generally known to Bahá'ís. (*Shoghi* is an Arabic name meaning “the one who longs”; *Effendi* is a Turkish honorific signifying “sir” or “master.”) He was appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and assumed the office upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in 1921.

SHRINE The original meaning of the word is a casket or case for books, but it later acquired the special meaning of a casket containing sacred relics, and thence a tomb of a saint, a chapel with special associations, or a place hallowed by some memory. It is used to denote the latter in Bahá'í terminology. The term “Holy Shrines,” for example, refers to the burial places of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The House associated with the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Montreal was designated by Shoghi Effendi as a Bahá'í shrine. Also, when referring to the All-American Convention held in 1944 to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the inception of the Bahá'í Faith, the Guardian wrote of the representatives of the American

Bahá'í community's being "Gathered within the walls of its national Shrine—the most sacred Temple ever to be reared to the glory of Bahá'u'lláh" (GPB p. 400).

SÍYÁH-CHÁL *Black Pit*: the subterranean dungeon in Tehran in which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned August-December 1852. Here, chained in darkness three flights of stairs underground, in the company of his fellow-Bábís and some 150 thieves and assassins, He received the first intimations of His world mission.

SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES Administrative institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order that operate at the local and national levels and are elected according to Bahá'í principles. They are responsible for coordinating and directing the affairs of the Bahá'í community in their areas of jurisdiction. The institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly is ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (referred to there as the "House of Justice"); the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly is established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. The term "Spiritual Assembly" was introduced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá so that, while the Faith is still generally unknown, people will not make the false deduction from the term "House of Justice" that it is a political institution. Regional Spiritual Assemblies have been elected in many areas and are gradually reduced in size and eventually replaced by National Spiritual Assemblies as the Faith expands and consolidates itself. See also **Elections, Bahá'í**.

SUPREME HOUSE OF JUSTICE See **Universal House of Justice**.

SUPREME PEN A title of **Bahá'u'lláh**.

SÚRIY-I-MULÚK *Tablet to the Kings*: revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople, referred to by Shoghi Effendi as "the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh." In it Bahá'u'lláh addresses collectively the monarchs of East and West, the Sulṭán of Turkey, the kings of Christendom, the French and Persian ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim clergy in Constantinople, the people of Persia, and the philosophers of the world. In the Súriy-i-Mulúk Bahá'u'lláh unequivocally and forcefully proclaims His station. See *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh* (pp. 7–12, 47–54, 102–03) for passages of the Súriy-i-Mulúk that have been translated into English.

T

TABLET OF CARMEL The charter of the world spiritual and administrative centers of the Bahá'í Faith, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in 1890 during one of His visits to Mount Carmel. See *GWB*, no. 11, or *TB*, pp. 3–5.

TABLETS Refers to letters revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

TABLETS OF THE DIVINE PLAN Fourteen Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1916 and 1917 and referred to as the charter for propagating the Bahá'í Faith.

Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, the Tablets convey His mandate for the transmission of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world. See also **Divine Plan**.

TEN YEAR WORLD CRUSADE See **Crusade, Ten Year World**.

TONGUE OF GRANDEUR See **Ancient Beauty**.

TRAINING INSTITUTE. A program designed to enrich the spiritual life of the participants and enable them to perform specific acts of service such as engaging in teaching activities, giving deepening courses, teaching children's classes, and activating Bahá'í community life.

TRANSITION, AGE OF or **PERIOD OF** See **Ages**.

TWIN HOLY CITIES Haifa and 'Akká, Israel.

TWIN HOLY SHRINES The Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. See also **Shrines**.

U

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE The supreme governing and legislative body of the Bahá'í Faith. The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the twin, crowning institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Elected every five years at an international Bahá'í convention, the Universal House of Justice gives spiritual guidance to and directs the administrative activities of the worldwide Bahá'í community. It is the institution Bahá'u'lláh ordained as the agency invested with authority to legislate on matters not covered in His writings. In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborates on its functions and affirms that it is infallibly guided.

W

WILL AND TESTAMENT OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ A document that Shoghi Effendi says is "unique in the annals of the world's religious systems," the Will and Testament is the charter of the Administrative Order of the Bahá'í Faith. Written, signed, and sealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Will and Testament consists of three sections written at three different times between 1901 and the year of His passing. The Will and Testament affirms "the two-fold character of the Mission of the Báb," which was to bring an independent revelation from God and to herald the coming of another, greater revelation through Bahá'u'lláh. It also "discloses the full station of" Bahá'u'lláh as the "Supreme Manifestation of God," declares the fundamental beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, establishes the institution of the Guardianship, and appoints Shoghi Effendi as Guardian. It provides for the election of the Universal House of Justice and defines its scope. It also creates the institution of the National

Spiritual Assembly, provides for the appointment of the Hands of the Cause of God and prescribes their obligations, and exposes the conduct of the Covenant-breakers.

WORLD CENTER See **Bahá'í World Center**.

WORLD CONGRESS See **Most Great Jubilee**.

WORLD CRUSADE See **Crusade, Ten Year World**.

WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH Bahá'u'lláh's "scheme for world-wide solidarity" that is "destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind." The current Bahá'í Administrative Order is its nucleus and pattern, providing the "rudiments of the future all-enfolding Bahá'í Commonwealth."

Y

YÁ 'ALÍYYU'L-A'LÁ *O Thou the Exalted, the Most Exalted!* A form of the **Báb's** name that is used as an invocation.

YÁ BAHÁ'U'L-ABHÁ *O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!* A form of **Bahá'u'lláh's** name (the **Greatest Name**) that is used as an invocation.

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