

To the friends of God in the sacred land of Iran

At the threshold of the new year and the Festival of Naw-Rúz, we remember you in this luminous and sacred Spot and recall how from the beginning of the appearance of the Sun of Truth, you have, with love and certitude, and with inexhaustible constancy and steadfastness, shone like brilliant stars in the firmament of Iran, and how, in the face of oppression and injustice, you have acted with such sincerity and patience as to become a source of pride and glory for the company of the faithful and an example to all the peoples of the world. Even in the midst of the current health crisis—with the many challenges to livelihoods it has created and the social problems it has caused, entangling the world and its peoples in numerous trials and afflictions—and despite the fact that the persecution and discrimination directed towards your community did not relent in the course of this past year or give you a moment's respite, you continued with your service, never ceased your endeavours for the good of humanity, and remained a flame of hope and a source of love and friendship for all. How fortunate you are to have added another golden page to the illustrious history of your community and to have won the good pleasure of God.

The Festival of Riḍván this year coincides with the end of the Five Year Plan and the conclusion of the twenty-five-year period during which the Bahá'í world was called upon to make a significant advance in the scope of its activities and human resources. In response to the call to that spiritual enterprise, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh arose in an unprecedented and determined manner such that, notwithstanding natural and inevitable ebbs and flows, their endeavours ultimately resulted in countless advances, effected a profound transformation, brought forth new capacities, and propelled the Bahá'í community to a new stage. To describe the nature of the victories and achievements of the community of the Greatest Name throughout the world in this historic period is beyond the scope of the present discussion, and we will attend to it at another time soon. The focus of our thoughts at this time, however, is the devoted undertakings of the community of the valiant followers of the Ancient Beauty in His sacred homeland who, during the course of this same period and inspired by the framework for action of the Bahá'í world, likewise brought about a significant transformation in their community and who, notwithstanding countless limitations and unfavourable conditions, once again fulfilled the requirements of fidelity. Despite myriad difficulties and problems, each one of which could reduce a mountain to a heap of dust, they raised aloft the banner of firmness and constancy and charged forth in the arena of servitude and built new capacities for service to the world of humanity. The spirit of learning born of action, reflection, and consultation became the axis of endeavours. Systematically and earnestly the younger generation was made the focus of special attention by the community. Children learned virtues and spirituality, and junior youth developed spiritual and moral attributes and eagerness for service. The youth, through the acquisition of a deep appreciation of their spiritual mission and a broad vision of the implications of the divine teachings for this new age, rushed to the fields of service and attained their rightful place in the vanguard of a vibrant and purposeful community. The unity and solidarity of all the members of the community was, through the pulsating force of the Covenant and Testament, increased, and cooperation and mutual support reached a high level. Through profound reflection on the Writings, attention to the guidance, and adherence to the foundational principle of consultation, perspectives became harmonized, the different endeavours of the community became coherent, and the various labours of the believers in the path of service yielded abundant fruit. The outward-looking culture of the community was strengthened to a considerable degree and led to a level of participation, greater than ever before, by the believers in the constructive discourses of their society. The valuable lessons acquired by those much-loved friends in the course of an entire century of determined endeavour in the path of building a dynamic community were with great sincerity shared selflessly with others. The experience gained as a result of efforts to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in this radiant age for the

achievement of the equality of women and men, social justice, the eradication of extremes of wealth and poverty, unity among different ethnicities, the empowerment of younger generations, and the refinement of character was offered to interested individuals without making any claims to perfection or superiority. And the friends, to the extent possible, became involved in consulting and collaborating with their fellow citizens in order to address various social ills. In sum, this significant transformation is worthy of profound admiration and represents a firm and secure foundation for future efforts.

Praised be God that the certain confirmations of the Concourse on high were vouchsafed and developments that at one time could scarcely be imagined came to pass. The widespread and extensive support for the rights of the Bahá'ís of Iran provided by governments and international organizations on behalf of the peoples of the world—which in recent decades has been constantly expressed and which has now reached such a height that the officials of two governments have independently called for the recognition of the Faith in Iran—in the course of the same period, gradually and in different ways, also became apparent on the part of the noble people of that land and was increasingly evident day by day. The veils were removed from the eyes, and through the efforts of scholars and others, and by the aid of new modes of communication, correct and accurate information became more widely available than at any other time. And in the minds and thoughts of many enlightened and unprejudiced souls, the truth of this precious Cause replaced the baseless calumnies of the prejudiced. The community's rectitude of conduct, long established, gained new recognition, your honesty and truthfulness astounded the world, and your complete innocence, pure intent, and lofty ideals were confirmed and proven in the eyes of countless souls. Such is the testimony of the Supreme Pen: "Absolute meekness yieldeth many a result and beareth many a fruit." Appreciate, then, this bounty, and look to the future with the eyes of hope.

Dear friends, in our message to the Bahá'ís of the world on the Day of the Covenant we conveyed the glad tidings of the launching of a Nine Year Plan which will begin after the conclusion of the One Year Plan, and we referred to the importance of the year ahead. As you are aware, this year is distinguished by the commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Orb of the Covenant, the perfect Exemplar of the people of Bahá. The spiritual inheritance bequeathed by that peerless and distinguished Being, Whose words transformed the hearts and Whose ways magnetized the souls, belongs, of course, to all humanity, yet it holds a special significance and implications for the people of Iran. Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá in childhood departed for exile in the company of His distinguished Father, He was never forgetful of His sacred and much-loved homeland. Throughout His life, even in the course of His travels to the Western world, He was ever occupied with the thought and mention of His compatriots, that perchance, with the aid of the teachings of God for this new Day and through the promotion of those qualities that are worthy of this age, the essential relationships of society in that land might be transformed, justice and fairness be manifested, the power of the intellect shine forth, learning and education become the principal axis of all affairs and, through the fundamental transformation of morals, every kind of progress and advance be made possible and lead ultimately to the exaltation of Iran. Therefore, through exposition of the divine teachings and encouragement to apply the insights they contain in order to remedy the problems and deficiencies of society, He addressed the people of that country generally, and the Bahá'ís specifically, counselling, advising, and urging them to sacrifice themselves in service to that sacred land, and repeatedly and emphatically assuring everyone of the bright future of Iran.

In one of His blessed Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "The future of Iran is of the utmost greatness, majesty, and glory, for it is the native land of the Blessed Beauty. All the nations of the earth will turn to and regard Iran with high esteem. Know of a certainty that it will make such progress as to dazzle the eyes of the mighty and the learned throughout the world." And in another instance He writes, "This house of sorrows will become a rose-garden one day; grieve not! Exert the utmost effort and sincerity in service to Iran and its people, and sorrow no more."

We greet every one of you on this blessed day and from the depths of our hearts ardently beseech, at the Threshold of Him Who is the Desire of the world, your health and well-being, your freedom and prosperity, and the descent of limitless confirmations upon you and all your compatriots.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]