

To the followers of the Divine Beloved  
in the sacred land of Iran

Dear spiritual sisters and brothers, vigilant protectors of the Cause of God,

The arrival of Naw-Rúz and the coming of the soul-stirring springtime is a welcome opportunity to express our deep love and affection and our profound appreciation and admiration for you, dwellers of the abode of faith in the sacred land of Iran. We convey our greetings to each and every one of those beloved of our hearts and souls on this joyous occasion and beseech the threshold of the Almighty to bestow upon you ever-greater confirmation as you tread the path of faithfulness.

The start of the new year is an opportune time to reflect on what has taken place in the past year and to give special attention to those truths about spiritual and social reality to which world events attest. It is of course clear to you, long-standing servants of the Abhá Beauty, that the revolution in the ordered life of the world and the chaos in the affairs of humanity are evidence of the advent of a new chapter in the never-ending story of the evolution of the social life of the human race. The suffering and pain currently afflicting the world are the inevitable labour pains of the birth of the next stage in the development of humanity from childhood to maturity, which is the realization of the unity of humankind and the establishment of a world civilization. The infinite bounties bestowed upon the world by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh make possible the attainment of that stage, so that universal peace may be firmly established, the earth become the mirror of the highest paradise, and the Most Great Justice, awaited with hope by all peoples throughout the ages and centuries, become manifest. As He states in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in this world, when the languishing and sore athirst will attain the living Kawthar of their Well-Beloved, and the erring wanderer, lost in the wilds of remoteness and nothingness, will enter the tabernacle of life, and attain reunion with his heart's desire. In the soil of whose heart will these holy seeds germinate? From the garden of whose soul will the blossoms of the invisible realities spring forth?

It is abundantly clear that many of the aspirations of the people of the world and their legitimate demands have become aligned with the teachings of God and that which the Supreme Pen has decreed for the betterment of the world and the building of a new civilization. They have become crystallized in such ideals as the equality of the rights of women and men, the equality of all people, the truthfulness and trustworthiness of rulers, social justice, the eradication of poverty on the one hand and of the extreme and uncontrollable wealth in the hands of a few on the other, the protection of the environment, the abolition of ethnic and religious prejudices, and the elimination of racism. Iranian society is no exception to this general phenomenon. A wide-ranging consensus has emerged in the expectations of the people of the globe. Despite countless challenges, age-old prejudices, and innumerable social problems that block the way for human progress, the efflorescence of such unity of thought at the level of ideals, hopes, and aspirations demonstrates an important advance that can serve as a strong basis for a fundamental change in the structures of human society.

O faithful helpers of the Cause of God! Since last Ridván the followers of the Ancient Beauty throughout the world have been embarked upon a new stage of the Divine Plan, the beginning of which coincided with the opening of the sixth epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith. As you know, the activities of the Bahá'í world in the coming years are focused on one central aim,

namely, the creation of the necessary conditions for the release of that great and heavenly society-building power that is latent within the reality and essence of the Cause of God. Such a lofty goal is, of course, founded upon the significant advances achieved and the heightened capacities developed in recent years by treading the path of learning and systematic action that have led to the progress and development of the individual, the community, and the institutions and the evolution of the relationships among them throughout the world. These developments have also led to the emergence of a new and deeper understanding of the high aims of the Faith for the spiritual and social advancement of the world of humanity. It comes as no surprise then that the inauguration of this new stage took place in the presence and with the active participation of a vast number of the friends and acquaintances of the community and well-wishers yearning for spiritual, moral, and social transformation, who gathered at over ten thousand conferences in numerous places across the world and responded as never before to the lofty goals of this new Plan. The Bahá'í community had never in its history experienced such a degree of collaboration with the rest of society and of commonality in goals and views in the path of service.

Among the victories achieved in the first few months of the Nine Year Plan, especially evident in areas where the activities of the community have advanced to a high degree, is that participants in the educational programmes of the community, no matter from what background, increasingly find the training institute to be an effective instrument for the upliftment of their environment and neighbourhood and consider themselves not only involved in but also responsible for its operation and its development and expansion. They see the prosperity and the betterment of their society, both now and in the future, to be dependent on their efforts to put the teachings for this new day into practice. At the start of this new and historic endeavour, we invited the Bahá'í world to take a more expansive view of the training institute process, to enhance the quality of the educational experience it offers, and to obtain a deeper understanding of its pedagogical principles, its methodology, and its central concepts, so that the Bahá'ís may increasingly understand the possibilities latent in the systematic study of the Word of God within the framework of the programmes of the training institute and recognize its powerful influence on the transformation of society. The results of such an expansive vision of the significance and implications of the endeavours of the Bahá'í world will gradually become manifest in the spiritual and moral growth and maturation of everyone, particularly the younger generations. This, together with the emphasis placed on the study of useful sciences and arts and the acquisition of knowledge and the skills needed for service to humanity, will help nurture latent powers and capacities and lead to intellectual, practical, scientific, artistic, technological, and agricultural advancement and progress in different societies.

Alas, another feature of the past year was the injustice and cruelty that were once again visited upon the community of the Greatest Name in the birthplace of this precious Faith. However, as we wrote in our letter of 23 August 2022 to those courageous followers of the Abhá Beauty, this time the persecutions evoked a widespread and exceptional response, not only in the international community and in public opinion generally, but also specifically among the noble people of Iran. This response ultimately led to unprecedented support for the rights of the Bahá'ís. Nevertheless, the oppression and injustice continued, and in the second half of the year, too, they were subjected to the pillaging of their homes and to unjustified arrests and cruel verdicts. Some of those innocent and noble souls, like sweetly singing birds, were imprisoned in the cage of enmity and hate. But the community of the Greatest Name did not cease to adhere to the divine teachings, nor did it retaliate in kind; it remained engaged, with sincerity, trustworthiness, meekness, and determination, in fulfilling its commitment to serve its cherished homeland. To poison, it responded with sweetest honey.

Some of the authorities resorted to a new ruse and devised a new scheme. They redoubled their pressure on the youth in particular, hoping that they might, through misrepresentation and deception, humiliate them, make them despondent, demoralize them, and deceive their pure

hearts. At specifically calculated times, while fully admitting to the trampling of the legitimate human rights of the Bahá'ís, which has continued through the vicissitudes of long years and in spite of transient and varying currents in the government and has affected every aspect of the life—whether individual, collective, educational, professional, or cultural—of every Iranian Bahá'í, from the smallest child to the oldest and most infirm, they shamelessly try to spread the idea that the community is itself to blame for its own persecution. They impute the responsibility to some of the active and devoted believers and claim that the chief reason for all these injustices is the dynamism of its community life. They have gone even further than this astonishing claim and have attempted to promote the utter falsehood that the cause of the persecutions is the adherence of the community to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and its allegiance to the Centre of the Cause. The foolish are ignorant, however, of the fact that the Bahá'í youth are mindful and wise, think deeply and see clearly, and have never paid heed to patent lies that precisely target the unity and harmony of the community and, ultimately, the Covenant of the Faith. The youth will transform these efforts of the enemies into an opportunity for strengthening the bonds of the community and deepening in the divine teachings, and will reflect deeply upon why some among the authorities are so intent upon weakening the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh.

To fulfil the lofty aims of the Nine Year Plan that relate to rendering material and spiritual service to society, it is fitting that the Bahá'ís throughout the world reflect on their historic as well as recent endeavours in assisting the process of development and transformation and examine their experience so that they can selflessly offer to everyone what they have learned and draw inspiration from it for participation in related discourses. Bahá'ís consider selfless and constant service to the world of humanity to be their duty and are determined to spare no sacrifice in this path. This intention is evident everywhere, but in the blessed land of Iran, given the long and illustrious history of the Faith there, this reality shines perhaps more brightly than anywhere else. It is for this reason that your experience, dear friends, is the focus of the attention of the believers throughout the world and a source of pride for them.

Consider what trailblazing actions and what dazzling initiatives the followers of Bahá'u'lláh undertook for the sake of the development and progress of Iran and in the discharge of the commitment to the good of humanity that He nurtured in them. See what a range of educational, medical, industrial, and agricultural establishments and what material, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural advancements were brought about as a result of the profound faith that generation after generation of those followers placed in the truth that success and prosperity, spiritual salvation and the good pleasure of God are made possible through service, love, and goodwill towards one's fellow beings. A few examples suffice to attest this truth. In some of the remotest corners of the country, more than a hundred years ago, the Bahá'ís of Iran established modern schools that they might impart knowledge to girls and boys and eradicate ignorance. By teaching literacy to adults, whether men or women, they swiftly eliminated illiteracy in their communities. Courageously and persistently, from the earliest days of the Cause, they have striven to promote the freedom of women and the equality of women and men and have endeavoured to ensure that this important principle—which is an inseparable aspect of Bahá'u'lláh's fundamental principle of the oneness of humanity—is not only implemented in their personal and family lives, but is also institutionalized in their social and administrative affairs as well as in their educational programmes. They established hospitals and dispensaries, so that with the aid of modern medical science and new inventions they might contribute to the health and well-being of their fellow citizens and heal physical ailments too. They have exerted great effort to contribute to the development and prosperity of cities and villages, to further industry and agriculture, and to exalt and celebrate the arts and crafts of Iran. They have endeavoured to remove ethnic and religious prejudices and have taught their children the lesson of the oneness of humanity from their earliest years. They have raised the banner of truthfulness, honesty, and moral conduct in such manner that, throughout the history of this blessed Cause, even its sworn enemies have confessed to their honesty and truthfulness and been astonished and dumbfounded to see that they refuse to deny the truth for the sake of worldly benefit, material advantage, or the preservation of their lives and possessions.

A hundred years ago they instituted the culture of freedom of choice and the election of representatives in every town and village in which they lived, and they have learned and practised consultation as a principle essential for the creation of harmony and unity together with variety and diversity. And above all, they have placed great value on education and have made every effort to ensure that, by means of educational programmes that train human character, the divine principles and teachings are translated into reality.

Despite all these accomplishments in the path of service, the Bahá'ís of Iran have never made any claim to perfection. They know that a road steep and rocky, with countless obstacles along the way, stretches out before them, and they therefore actively continue to strive for the betterment of their country. However, what today makes their experience more valuable than ever before and worthy of special reflection is the reality that those heroes have accomplished these feats in spite of constant persecution and ceaseless threats. How numerous the hardships they endured in this arena, and yet out of loyalty to their spiritual and moral commitment and out of love for God, love for Iran and its people, and love for all the peoples of the world, they sacrificed not only their time and their possessions but their very lives, and remained fast and firm as the majestic mountain.

In these days when your noble compatriots, more than at any other time, share not only your ideals but your sufferings, are subjected to countless afflictions, and endure numerous and astonishing wounds—the pain of which lacerates every awakened soul and breaks every pure heart—it beseems you heroes to cast, like bright candles, the light of hope and to impart, even as burning flames, the warmth of affection. Nurse the sick and be a balm to the wounded. Console the suffering and aid and befriend the deprived. Freely share your precious experience with your fellow citizens and revive in all the hearts confidence and faith in the brilliant future of Iran and of the whole world. This is your mission, you who are nigh unto God. This is the attribute of His ardent lovers. This is worthy of servitude to His Threshold.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]