

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Having ended a year of momentous achievements, we stand at the threshold of the last decade of this radiant twentieth century facing an immediate future of immense challenges and dazzling prospects. The swiftness of events during the past year is indicative of the acceleration, as the hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension approaches, of the spiritual forces released with the advent of His revolutionizing mission. It is an acceleration which, in its suddenness and wide transformational impact on social thought and on political entities, has aroused feelings of delight as to its immediate effects and of bewilderment as to its real meaning and destined outcome, prompting the astonished editors of an outstanding newspaper, finding themselves bereft of explanations, to attribute it to the workings of an "Invisible Hand."

For the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world there can be no doubt as to the Divine Source and clear intention of these extraordinary happenings. Let us rejoice, therefore, in the wondrous signs of the beneficence of God's abounding grace. The high level of teaching and enrollments reported last Riḍván has been sustained, and new fields of teaching have been opened from Eastern Europe to the China Sea. With the settlement in recent weeks of two Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in Sakhalin Island, the last remaining territory named by Shoghi Effendi in his Ten Year Global Plan entered the Bahá'í fold. The recreation last Riḍván of the Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Ishqábád, the recent election of that of Cluj in Romania, the first new Assembly in the "East Bloc," the reestablishment and formation this Riḍván of Local Spiritual Assemblies in other parts of the Soviet Union and in other countries of Eastern Europe—all these achievements and immediate prospects affirm our arrival at a significant milestone in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. The Administrative Order now embraces a community of wider diversity than ever before. It is such prodigious developments that prompted our recent announcement of a subsidiary Two Year Teaching Plan, now formally launched, to which we commend your urgent and active attention.

How staggering, how far-reaching have been the activities which propelled the community in one short year towards this stage in its evolution! As we reflect on the wonders of Bahá'u'lláh's confirmations, our hearts turn with love and appreciation to the Hands of the Cause of God everywhere, who, as the standard-bearers of that community, have ever upheld its bright emblems against the darkness of the times. With an indomitable spirit they persevere in fulfilling, under all circumstances and wherever they may be, their God-given tasks to stimulate, edify, and advise its widely scattered, rapidly multiplying members. In the face of the new situation in the Bahá'í world, we take joy in mentioning some instances in the past year of association of Hands of the Cause with the developments in Europe and Asia. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, in an extended journey to the Far East, represented the Universal House of Justice at the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Macau; spent time with the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh in Mongolia where subsequently the first native declared her belief in Bahá'u'lláh; and devoted much attention to the friends in different parts of the People's Republic of China, where her film "The Green Light Expedition" has been shown on television. Mr. Collis Featherstone focused much energy on reinvigorating the long-suffering friends in war-ravaged Vietnam. At this very moment, Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan is visiting the USSR, which he was forced to leave during the persecution of the Faith there; now he has returned in triumphant fulfillment of a wish expressed to him by our beloved Guardian some sixty years ago.

Nor have the Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre been slow in responding to opportunities to foster the climate of progress now evident in all quarters of the globe. Through the unified vision of growth to which they have called the Continental Boards of Counselors and their able, hardworking and self-sacrificing auxiliaries, a new vitality can be felt in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world. The Continental Counselors deserve the deep gratitude of the entire Bahá'í community as they approach the close of their current five-year term, distinguished for their outstanding services.

Just as the community has extended its ramifications internally, it has also expanded its relations, influence and appeal externally in a variety of ways, some astonishing in their breadth and potential. A few examples will suffice: Through the newly established Office of the Environment, the Bahá'í International Community, on its own initiative and in collaboration with other environmental organizations, 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 evolved to a new stage. For the first time, a United Nations representative was able officially to meet on Iranian soil with a representative of the proscribed Bahá'í community. The result was recorded in a report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, at whose recent session in Geneva a resolution on Iran mentioning the Bahá'ís was again adopted. In a corollary action of far-reaching importance the United States House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'í community and outlining steps to be taken by the United States Government towards this end; a similar resolution is before the Senate.

In the Holy Land, preparations for the execution of the building projects on Mount Carmel received a definite boost. It is a cause of deep satisfaction that, on the eve of Naw-Rúz, the District Town Planning Commission, after delicate and complex negotiations, decided to approve the plan submitted by the Bahá'í World Centre. This paves the way for the ultimate issuance of building permits.

Beloved Friends: Merely two years separate us from the conclusion of the Six Year Plan and the beginning at Ridván 1992 of the Holy Year, that special time when we shall pause to appreciate the tumultuous record of events which will have brought us to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and to reflect with due solemnity upon the redemptive purpose of the life of the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet.

In anticipation of this high watermark in Bahá'í history, plans have been set in motion for two major world events: One, the gathering in the Holy Land of a wide representation of believers from around the globe to participate in a befitting commemoration of that poignant consummation in the vicinity of the Most Holy Shrine. A component of this commemoration, symbolic of the transcendent and victorious influence of Bahá'u'lláh's liberated Spirit, will be the depositing beneath the floor at the entrance door of His Shrine of a receptacle containing the illuminated Roll

of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, a listing initiated by Shoghi Effendi during his Ten Year Plan of those intrepid souls who arose to conquer in the Name of their Lord virgin territories mentioned in that Plan. This will have brought to a fitting conclusion, after nearly four decades, an intention expressed by the beloved Guardian himself. The living Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will be invited to witness this occurrence.

The other event will be the Bahá'í World Congress to celebrate the centennial of the inauguration of the Covenant bequeathed to posterity by Bahá'u'lláh as the sure means of safeguarding the unity and integrity of His world-embracing Order. It is to be convened in November 1992 in New York, the place designated as the City of the Covenant by Him Who is its appointed Center and Who anticipated that "New York will become a blessed spot from which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testament of God will go forth to every part of the world."

Related events at the local and national levels will combine with these two primary occasions to give vent to the innermost sentiments of the Bahá'ís and to impress on the public the profound fact of the appearance in the world of the Lord of the Covenant and the aims and achievements of His sublime mission. Indeed, plans are in progress to mount an intensive campaign to emblazon His Name across the globe.

The friends everywhere must now orient themselves to the significances of these twin anniversaries. They must be spiritually prepared through prayer and study of the Teachings to obtain a deeper appreciation of the station and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh and of the basic meaning of His mighty Covenant. Such preparation is at the very core of their striving to effect a transformation in their individual and collective lives. Let all the friends—every man, woman and youth—demonstrate through the high quality of their inner life and private character, the unified spirit of their association one with another, the rectitude of their conduct in relation to all, and the excellence of their achievements, that they belong to a truly enlightened and exemplary community; that their Best Beloved, whose Ascension they will commemorate, had not suffered His life on earth in vain. Let these requisites be the standard of their efforts to teach His Cause, the hallmark of their homage to the King of Kings.

Our dear and valued Coworkers: It is at such a time of profound anticipation for us that world society finds itself in a critical phase of its transition to the character envisioned for it by the Lord of the Age. The winds of God rage on, upsetting old systems, adding impetus to the deep yearning for a new order in human affairs, and opening the way for the hoisting of the banner of Bahá'u'lláh in lands from which it has hitherto been barred. The rapidity of the changes being wrought stirs up the expectations which inspire our dreams in the closing decade of the twentieth century. The situation is equally a bright portent and a weighty challenge.

It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day society which attainment to the Lesser Peace implies. Hopeful as are the signs, we cannot forget that the dark passage of the Age of Transition has not been fully traversed; it is as yet long, slippery and tortuous. For godlessness is rife, materialism rampant. Nationalism and racism still work their treachery in men's hearts, and humanity remains blind to the spiritual foundations of the solution to its economic woes. For the Bahá'í community the situation is a particular challenge, because time is running out and we have serious commitments to keep. The most immediate of these are: One, to teach the Cause of God and build its divinely ordained institutions throughout the world with wisdom, courage and urgency; and two, to complete on Mount Carmel the construction of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the remaining buildings on the Arc of the World Administrative Center of the Faith. The one calls for resolute, sustained and confident action on the part of the individual believer. The other requires a liberal outpouring of funds. Both are intimately related.

Over the last two years, almost one million souls entered the Cause. The increasing instances of entry by troops in different places contributed to that growth, drawing attention to Shoghi Effendi's vision which shapes our perception of glorious future possibilities in the teaching field. For he has asserted that the process of "entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world ... will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." We have every encouragement to believe that large-scale enrollments will expand, involving village after village, town after town, from one country to another. However, it is not for us to wait passively for the ultimate fulfillment of Shoghi Effendi's vision. We few, placing our whole trust in the providence of God and regarding as a divine privilege the challenges which face us, must proceed to victory with the plans in hand.

An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our aforementioned commitments. Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.

The Order brought by Bahá'u'lláh is intended to guide the progress and resolve the problems of society. Our numbers are as yet too small to effect an adequate demonstration of the potentialities inherent in the administrative system we are building, and the efficacy of this system will not be fully appreciated without a vast expansion of our membership. With the prevailing situation in the world the necessity to effect such a demonstration becomes more compelling. It is all too obvious that even those who rail against the defects of the old order, and would even tear it down, are themselves bereft of any viable alternative to put in its place. Since the Administrative Order is designed to be a pattern for future society, the visibility of such a pattern will be a signal of hope to those who despair.

Thus far, we have achieved a marvelous diversity in the large numbers of ethnic groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to fortify it through larger enrollments from among groups already represented and the attraction of members from groups not yet reached. However, there is another category of diversity which must be built up and without which the Cause will not be able adequately to meet the challenges being thrust upon it. Its membership, regardless of ethnic variety, needs now to embrace increasing numbers of people of capacity, including persons of accomplishment and prominence in the various fields of human endeavor. Enrolling significant numbers of such persons is an indispensable aspect of teaching the masses, an aspect which cannot any longer be neglected and which must be consciously and deliberately incorporated into our teaching work, so as to broaden its base and accelerate the process of entry by troops. So important and timely is the need for action on this matter that we are impelled to call upon Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies to devote serious attention to it in their consultations and plans.

The affairs of mankind have reached a stage at which increasing calls will be made upon our community to assist, through advice and practical measures, in solving critical social problems. It is a service that we will gladly render, but this means that our Local and National Spiritual

Assemblies must adhere more scrupulously to principle. With increasing public attention being focused on the Cause of God, it becomes imperative for Bahá'í institutions to improve their performance, through a closer identification with the fundamental verities of the Faith, through greater conformity to the spirit and form of Bahá'í administration and through a keener reliance on the beneficial effects of proper consultation, so that the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will offer hope to the disillusioned members of society.

That there are indications that the Lesser Peace cannot be too far distant, that the local and national institutions of the Administrative Order are growing steadily in experience and influence, that the plans for the construction of the remaining administrative edifices on the Arc are in an advanced stage—that these hopeful conditions make more discernible the shaping of the dynamic synchronization envisaged by Shoghi Effendi, no honest observer can deny.

As a community clearly in the vanguard of the constructive forces at work on the planet, and as one which has access to proven knowledge, let us be about our Father's business. He will, from His glorious retreats on high, release liberal effusions of His grace upon our humble efforts, astonishing us with the incalculable victories of His conquering power. It is for the unceasing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]