

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Riḍván season, with its inherent splendors and its initiation of unusual, eventful days, our hearts throb in wonderment, we kneel in homage to the King of Glory by Whose grace we have arrived at an auspicious juncture in the history of His Cause.

From the peak of triumph of the Six Year Plan now ended, we come to the threshold of the Holy Year, now begun, awestruck at the very thought of the unique significances associated with the commemoration of that sanctified occasion one hundred years ago when Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of all ages, took His leave of this earthly life. The Sun of Truth, however, was to set only to shine everlastingly from the "Kingdom of fadeless glory," thenceforward to shed the radiance of its regenerative power on the entire world. Gone from this plane was He Who is the Author of a Revelation of "inconceivable greatness" in which "all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation"; the Originator of a new Universal Cycle "that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years"; the Founder of a World Order, a "System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." Moreover, He was the Dawning Point of the Day of God, the "Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men." Such are the superlative realities upon which our contemplations are focused during this special anniversary occurring at this crucial moment in the affairs of humankind.

So imbued are we by the sacred remembrances evoked by this Holy Year, that we can do no less than invite you all to take pause to enter into this period of reflection, this time of reconsecration, this stage of preparation for tasks yet to be done, heights yet to be attained, splendors yet to be unveiled. For if we look back at one hundred years of an unexampled history of unremitting progress, we also look forward to many centuries of unfolding fulfillment of divine purpose—fulfillment, which as experience has shown, is incrementally realized through the systematic advances of Plans and the wondrous leaps and thrusts of epochs.

Indeed, the immediate portal to this propitious Holy Year is the vista of new horizons opened by the triumph of the Six Year Plan, which coincided with the initial phase of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith. Overall it is not so much a triumph in numerical achievements, though in many places and at particular moments the scope of expansion was extraordinary. It is a triumph that has been manifested in a new variety of victories, in new beginnings, fresh initiatives and mature institutional developments, such as to stamp the seal of success on the Plan's seven major objectives. Impossible as it is to enumerate in these few pages the results of the Plan, the main aspects of the developments in this remarkably dynamic period deserve, nonetheless, to be highlighted. The Bahá'í community changed markedly over the last six years. The major indicators are, no doubt, discernible to the friends everywhere and may be summed up thus:

One: The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is represented in every country on earth. The sudden change in the political climate, no doubt by intervention of God's Major Plan, opened vast regions to the penetration of the divine teachings, primarily in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. The opportunities created by this change made possible the settlement of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in the last virgin territories that remained from Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year World Crusade. They also impelled the launching at 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.

Three: The dedication in December 1986 of the Mother Temple of the Indian Subcontinent to public worship introduced a new force to the teaching and proclamation activities of the Faith. As an edifice of rare beauty and excellence, the "Lotus Temple" has won wide acclaim, while at the same time exerting an extraordinary appeal to great numbers of visitors. Its fame as an architectural wonder spread with speed as did its spiritual influence. It is no exaggeration to say that of all the Bahá'í Houses of Worship, this Temple is today the single most effective silent teacher of the Faith, annually attracting more visitors, at the average rate of 20,000 daily, than all the other Bahá'í Temples combined. Among its visitors from many lands are some of the most prominent persons in the world. A source of great interest to the media, the Temple has been featured in television programs, even in Russia and China. The influence of its success in these respects has contributed immeasurably to the widespread public awareness of the Faith.

Four: The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in distinctive ways. In learned circles, in reference works and in the media, the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a "principal" or "major" world religion. Media coverage of the Faith's activities has increased voluminously by the intensified efforts of the friends in proclamation activities, but more important is the fact that the media are showing an independent interest in the Bahá'í community and are initiating contacts with it in various parts of the world. The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá'í ideas in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá'ís to participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or with nongovernmental organizations.

Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the realization that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that the Bahá'í community should take a more active part in public affairs. The notable success of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment, established during the Plan, amply illustrates the nature of these developments. Furthermore, the formal relationship which the Bahá'í International Community established with the Conservation and Religion Network of the World Wide Fund for

Nature and with the World Conference on Religion and Peace, in conjunction with the numerous such relationships established by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in their respective jurisdictions, reflects a trend in the Faith's emergence as an entity to be reckoned with. Altogether, the drive of the ramified proclamation campaign has produced a public resonance about the Faith, which can be said to be known to the most significant public institutions and prominent persons on earth.

Five: Bahá'í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy, the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from governments and international nongovernmental organizations, as, for example, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, German and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international nongovernmental agencies.

Six: Youth activities took on a special character shaped by the idea of a youth year of service. The involvement of the youth in the Six Year Plan as short-term pioneers, traveling teachers and projectors had a profound effect on the teaching work overall and in bolstering the efforts at social and economic development attempted by growing numbers of national and local communities. They had much to do with the many victories in the former communist countries. Their work in social and economic development projects attracted, in some cases, the attention of governments and development organizations. Creation of the European Bahá'í Youth Council galvanized the activities of the youth which powerfully reinforced the teaching thrust on that continent during the final years of the Plan. A significant feature of the youth's activities has been their involvement, as short-term volunteers from all parts of the planet, in the work of the World Center where their services have been of inestimable value.

Seven: The advances in the consolidation of the Bahá'í administrative system are evident from the marked improvement in the internal development and collaborative efforts of its two arms. The cherished and intrepid Hands of the Cause of God, true to the allegiance they bear to their beloved Guardian, persevere in their unique services, astonishing the community with their resilient powers. The growth in confidence and strength of the Boards of Counselors and their auxiliaries, backed by a reinforced and vigorous International Teaching Centre, assured to the Spiritual Assemblies, whom they are charged to stimulate and advise, a buttressing indispensable to the welfare of the entire system; while the extension of the span of activities of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, themselves charged with guiding the destinies of their communities, significantly broadened the base of that system. Collaterally, the work of these institutions has facilitated and boosted the evolution of the Administrative Order. Even more: they have demonstrated a creative energy that bodes well for their continued maturation.

Eight: The great building projects on the Mountain of God, anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Carmel, inaugurated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the construction of the Tomb of the Báb and carried forward in the plans of Shoghi Effendi, entered a new stage. Work commenced in May 1990 on reinforcing and extending the main terrace of the Shrine of the Báb as the initial step towards realizing the architectural concept for fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of the Terraces that will extend from the foot to the ridge of the mountain. By September of the next year, ground was broken for the construction of the Center for the Study of the Texts and for the Extension to the International Archives Building, to be followed by the construction of other edifices on the Arc,

namely: the buildings for the International Teaching Centre and, in due course, the International Bahá'í Library.

All these developments have made it evident that the accumulated potential for further progress of the Bahá'í community is incalculable. The changed situation within and among nations and the many problems afflicting society amplify this potential. The impression produced by such change is of the near approach of the Lesser Peace. But there has been a simultaneous recrudescence of countervailing forces. With the fresh tide of political freedom resulting from the collapse of the strongholds of communism has come an explosion of nationalism. The concomitant rise of racism in many regions has become a matter of serious global concern. These are compounded by an upsurge in religious fundamentalism which is poisoning the wells of tolerance. Terrorism is rife. Widespread uncertainty about the condition of the economy indicates a deep disorder in the management of the material affairs of the planet, a condition which can only exacerbate the sense of frustration and futility affecting the political realm. The worsening state of the environment and of the health of huge populations is a source of alarm. And yet an element of this change is the amazing advances in communications technology making possible the rapid transmission of information and ideas from one part of the world to the other. It is against such "simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other," that a myriad new opportunities for the next stage in the unfoldment of the beloved Master's Divine Plan present themselves.

The burgeoning influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation seemed, with the imminence of the Holy Year, to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structures of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. The call for unity, for a new world order, is audible from many directions. The change in world society is characterized by a phenomenal speed. A feature of this change is a suddenness, or precipitateness, which appears to be the consequence of some mysterious, rampant force. The positive aspects of this change reveal an unaccustomed openness to global concepts, movement towards international and regional collaboration, an inclination of warring parties to opt for peaceful solutions, a search for spiritual values. Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.

The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of the utmost urgency, calls to mind the encouraging global vision of Shoghi Effendi for the prospects of the Administrative Order during the second century of the Bahá'í Era, whose midpoint we are rapidly approaching. In 1946, he wrote: "The second century is destined to witness a tremendous deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the worldwide development of that Order, as well as the first stirrings of that World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the precursor, the nucleus and pattern—an Order which, as it slowly crystallizes and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order."

Attention to the special occasions of the Holy Year will surely equip us to undertake the urgent tasks of the next stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan. This commemorative period provides a befitting demarcation between the glories and triumphs of the last one hundred years and the lustrous prizes yet to be garnered. At the outset, we welcome with joyous and grateful hearts the further expansion and consolidation of the Administrative Order which will accrue from the formation this Ridván 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 Ridván will reach 165.

We are pleased to announce that the following Hands of the Cause of God will attend, as our representatives, six of the founding Conventions. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum will attend the Conventions of Bulgaria and of Poland; Mr. 'Alí Akbar Furútan will attend those of the Baltic States and of Hungary; and Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá will attend those of Greenland and of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. At the remaining Conventions our representatives will be Counselors: Mr. George Allen, the Congo Republic; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Central Asia; Mr. Rolf von Czékus, Angola; Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi, Niger; Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Albania; and Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí, Azerbaijan.

Only a few weeks from now, in the sacred precincts of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, a gathering of solemn purpose will take place to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Desire of the Nations. The scroll bearing the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will, on the previous morning, 28 May, have been deposited, as indicated by our beloved Guardian, at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Most Holy Shrine, there to remain a symbol of the historic victory that rewarded the unswerving determination of the lovers of the Blessed Beauty who, in response to the call of the mighty Ten Year Crusade, planted the banner of His Faith in virgin territories throughout the world.

Subsequently, in November, at the second Bahá'í World Congress, the hosts of Bahá will gather in New York in their thousands to register, in a highly symbolic gesture on behalf of their brethren throughout the world, their regard for the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh bequeathed, and to evoke the memory of Him Who was appointed its Center and Who exalted that metropolis by bestowing upon it the designation "City of the Covenant." There they will also demonstrate the power of the unity that the Covenant is meant to ensure to all the peoples of the world. It will be a moment of capital importance to the Bahá'í community in the gaze of the world at large.

These two international events are pivotal to the gatherings of similar intent in which the friends in every corner of the world will take part. The spiritual character and dignified manner of their participation will surely draw down confirmations from on high and profoundly influence the constructive forces at work throughout the earth.

Another source of blessings to which we have long directed our hopes will also become manifest. Bahá'u'lláh has written: "While in prison We have revealed a Book which We have entitled 'The Most Holy Book.' We have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth." Hence, it is with full cognizance of its world-shaking significance that we inform you of the forthcoming publication during the course of this year of the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Charter of the future world civilization which Bahá'u'lláh revealed in the House of 'Údí Khammár in 'Akká some six score years ago.

And now, amid the eager anticipations occasioned by the two major commemorative events and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh takes effect as part of the constant practice of the members of our entire world community. May the promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.

A year charged with happenings of such sacred import is bound to yield consequences of unimaginable potency. The immediate outcome is, however, impossible to predict, nor can it be fruitfully speculated about. Rather should we direct our thoughts to the meaning of the solemn occasions which this year is set apart to memorialize. For the purpose of the Holy Year is not

fulfilled by public memorials alone, befitting as they will be. Essential to its purpose is the opportunity it offers for inner reflection on the part of every Bahá'í individual. Indeed, this is a special time for a rendezvous of the soul with the Source of its light and guidance, a time to turn to Bahá'u'lláh, to seek to obtain a deeper appreciation of His purpose, to renew allegiance to Him. This is a time of retreat to one's innermost being, to the dwelling-place of the Spirit of Bahá, that interior to which He summons us when He says: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." This is a time for recommitment to the Covenant, for rededication to duty, for revitalizing the energy for teaching, the "most meritorious of all deeds."

As the foremost aid to your reflections and actions, you will doubtless draw upon the insight and inspiration of such of His words as these: "I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way." "By My Life! Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me." "I have come in the shadows of the clouds of glory, and am invested by God with invincible sovereignty." "He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me." "Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant." "The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness."

Whatever our private reflections or response to duty may lead us to do, of one thing we must be sure: that the Name of Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World becomes known throughout the earth among high and low alike. Considering that it is already a whole century since the Blessed Beauty ascended, and given the crushing weight of the ills burdening the peoples of the world, and seeing that a veritable cry of anguish is issuing more loudly from the hearts of those who long for some hope of relief, we, His avowed servants, can neither falter nor fail in this primary and urgent duty. For He, Bahá'u'lláh, is the Supreme Manifestation, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, the Fountainhead of Justice, the immortal Beloved; for, according to His own unerring proclamation, "He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven." Let us bear His Name with dignity to those who must hear It, offer It as a treasure to those who must receive It, speak It with love to those who must embrace It.

How laudable it would be if, imbued by this desire to blazon abroad His Name, and as a demonstration of our special love for the Abhá Beauty, we could each of us mount a personal campaign of teaching, such that the collective force and results of it throughout the world would bring to a resounding conclusion the sacred exercises of this Holy Year and set the stage for the launching of the impending Three Year Plan at Ridván 1993!

Finally, it is highly fitting at this time to recall Bahá'u'lláh's expression in the Most Holy Book of His will for us with regard to the nature of our reactions to His passing: "Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world," He wrote, "when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose."

Beloved friends, we shall not forget to supplicate at the Holy Threshold that from His retreat of deathless splendor the Blessed Beauty may fill the souls of each and all of you with the revivifying breath of His celestial power.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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