

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

14 June 1996

[To an individual]

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....

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,

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.

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." 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." 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 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."

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.

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