THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1966

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the revelation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in March and April 1916, of the first Tablets of the Divine Plan, has witnessed the conclusion of a feat of pioneering unparalleled in the annals of the Cause. A year ago the call was raised for four-hundred-and-sixty-one pioneers to leave their homes within twelve months and scatter throughout the planet to broaden and strengthen the foundations of the world community of Bahá'u'lláh. There is every hope that with the exception of thirty-four posts whose settlement is dependent upon favorable circumstances all the pioneer goals will be filled by Riḍván or their settlement will be assured by firm commitments. The gratitude and admiration of the entire Bahá'í world go out to this noble band of dedicated believers who have so gloriously responded to the call. These pioneers, who have arisen for the specified goals, have been reinforced by a further forty-five believers who have settled in the goal territories, while sixty-nine more have left their homes to reside in twenty-six other countries already opened to the Faith. All told, in the course of the year, five-hundred-and-five Bahá'ís have arisen to pioneer beyond their homelands, the largest number ever to do so in any one year in the entire history of the Cause.

This is a resounding victory, and in the light of the Master's statement in the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, "It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation," of wonderful portent for the future. Its immediate results are the opening of twenty-four new territories to the Faith, the resettlement of four others, and the consolidation of ninety-three more. The newly opened territories are: Chad and Niger in Africa; Alaskan Peninsula, Barbuda, Cayman Islands, Chiloé Island, Providencia Island, Quintana Roo Territory, Saba, St. Andrés Island, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lawrence Island, Tierra del Fuego, and Turks and Caicos Islands in the Americas; Laccadive Islands and Marmara Island in Asia; Niue Island in Australasia; and Bornholm, Capri, Elba, Gotland, Inner Hebrides, and Ischia in Europe.

The resettled territories are: Corisco Island and Spanish Guinea in Africa and Maldive Islands and Nicobar Islands in Asia.

As announced last Riḍván, the first Convention of the Bahá'ís of Brunei will be held this year, during the second weekend of the Riḍván period, when the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brunei will be elected. Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone will represent the World Center of the Faith on this historic occasion.

A further result of the confirmations which have rewarded the tremendous teaching effort of the past two years is the call now made by the House of Justice for the formation at Riḍván 1967 of the following nine National Spiritual Assemblies: in Africa—the National Spiritual Assembly of Algeria and Tunisia with its seat in Algiers; the National Spiritual Assembly of Cameroon Republic with its seat in Victoria and with Spanish Guinea, Fernando Po, Corisco and São Tomé and Príncipe Islands assigned to it; the National Spiritual Assembly of Eswatini, Mozambique and Basutoland with its seat in Mbabane; the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia with its seat in Lusaka. In the Americas—the National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands with its seat in Charlotte Amalie. In Asia—the National Spiritual Assembly of Cambodia with its seat in Phnom Penh; the National Spiritual Assembly of Eastern and Southern Arabia with its seat in Bahrayn; the National Spiritual Assembly of Taiwan with its seat in Taipei. In Australasia—the National Spiritual Assembly of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands with its seat in Tarawa. These nine new National Spiritual Assemblies constituting, together with the new National Spiritual

Assembly of Brunei, ten additional pillars of the Universal House of Justice, will bring to seventy-nine the number which will take part during Riḍván 1968 in the second International Convention for the election of that Institution.

This momentous year cannot be allowed to pass without mention of the tireless and dedicated services of the beloved Hands of the Cause, the Standard-Bearers of the Nine Year Plan, and the able support rendered them by their Auxiliary Boards. The special missions which they have discharged on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, the teaching tours they have undertaken, the conferences they have organized, their constant work at the World Center, and above all their never-ending encouragement of the friends and watchfulness over the welfare of the Cause of God, have given distinction and effective leadership to the work of the entire community. The grievous loss which they sustained in the passing of Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas is shared by the whole Bahá'í world.

The splendid achievements in the pioneering and teaching fields, together with the enthusiastic attention given to the preparation of plans for the befitting celebration of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation of His Message to the kings and rulers of the world, have sealed with success the first, and opened the way for the second phase of the Nine Year Plan, a phase in which the Bahá'í world must prepare and arm itself for the third phase, beginning in October 1967 when the six intercontinental conferences will sound the "opening notes" of a period of proclamation of the Cause of God extending through the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan to the centenary, in 1973, of the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas The threefold purpose of these conferences is to commemorate the centenary of the opening of Bahá'u'lláh's Own proclamation of His Mission, to proclaim the Divine Message, and to deliberate upon the tasks of the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan.

Five specific tasks face the Bahá'í world as it enters this second phase of the Plan:

The first is to complete the settlement of the pioneers, and the dispatch of others wherever needed.

The second is intensive preparation for the third phase of the Plan through development of new teaching measures and expansion of the various Bahá'í funds at international, national and local levels.

The third is acceleration of the provision of Bahá'í literature, particularly its translation and publication in those languages in which, as yet, none has been published or the supply is inadequate.

The fourth is the acquisition of the remaining national Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites, national endowments and teaching institutes called for in the Plan, before the developing inflation now affecting nearly the whole world adds too greatly to the financial burden of acquiring these properties.

The fifth is development of the Panama Temple Fund. The Universal House of Justice is initiating this Fund with a contribution of $25,000, and now calls upon the believers and Bahá'í communities to contribute liberally and continuously until the funds for the completion of this historic structure are assured. Such contributions should be sent directly to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. More than fifty designs have been received, and the House of Justice is now considering the recommendations of the National Assembly. The choice will be announced and the friends will be kept fully informed of the progress of this highly significant and inspiring project.

Every individual follower of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the institutions of the Faith, at local, national, continental and world levels, must now meet the challenge to raise the intensity of teaching to a pitch never before attained, in order to realize that vast increase called for in the

Plan. For those believers living in countries where they have freedom to teach their Faith, this challenge is the more sharply pointed by the oppressive measures imposed on the Faith elsewhere. In Persia the believers are denied their elementary rights and the Faith is still largely proscribed. In Iraq the national and one local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds have been seized and the activities of the friends severely restricted. In Egypt Bahá'í properties are still confiscated and recently several believers were imprisoned for a period, and are now awaiting trial. New oppression has broken out in Indonesia where the national Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds has been seized and organized activities of the believers have been forbidden. In yet other countries the believers are subject to restrictions and surveillance. The friends in all cases are steadfast and confident, looking forward to their emancipation and the eventual triumph of the Cause.

The challenge to the local and national administrative institutions of the Faith is to organize and promote the teaching work through systematic plans, involving not only the regular fireside meetings in the homes of the believers, the public meetings, receptions and conferences, the weekend, summer and winter schools, the youth conferences and activities, all of which are so vigorously upheld at present, but in addition through a constant stream of visiting teachers to every locality. The forces released by this latter process have been extolled by Bahá'u'lláh in these words:

> The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world. In the Books of old the station of them that have voyaged far and near in order to guide the servants of God hath been set forth and written down.

while 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, says:

> Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world ...

Such plans must be initiated and developed now, during this period of preparation, so that they may be fully operative by the beginning of the proclamation period from which time they must be relentlessly pursued until the end of the Plan.

The Universal House of Justice attaches such importance to this principle of traveling teaching that it has decided to develop it internationally, and now calls for volunteers to offer their services in this field. By their visits to lands other than their own, these friends will lend a tremendous stimulus to the proclamation and teaching of the Cause in all continents. It is hoped that such projects will be self-supporting, since the International Deputization Fund will still be needed for pioneering. However, when a proposal which is considered to be of special benefit to the Faith cannot be financed by the individual or the receiving National Assemblies, the House of Justice will consider a request for assistance from the Deputization Fund. Offers, which may be for any period, should be made to one's own National Spiritual Assembly or to the Continental Pioneer Committees, which have been given the additional task of assisting National Assemblies to implement and coordinate this new enterprise. Let those who arise recall the Master's injunction to "travel like 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... sanctified and free from every attachment and in the utmost severance."

Simultaneous and coequal with this vast, ordered and ever-growing teaching effort, the work of consolidation must go hand in hand. In fact these two processes must be regarded as inseparable parts of the expansion of the Faith. While the work of teaching inevitably goes first, to pursue it alone without consolidation would leave the community unprepared to receive the masses who must sooner or later respond to the life-giving message of the Cause. The guidance of our beloved Guardian in this vital matter is, as ever, clear and unambiguous: "Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá'í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development.

From this vital, this ever-present need attention must, at no time, be diverted; nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the no less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Bahá'í administrative institutions." A proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development must, from now on, as we enter the era of large-scale conversion, be maintained by the Bahá'í Community. Consolidation must comprise not only the establishment of Bahá'í administrative institutions, but a true deepening in the fundamental verities of the Cause and in its spiritual principles, understanding of its prime purpose in the establishment of the unity of mankind, instruction in its standards of behavior in all aspects of private and public life, in the particular practice of Bahá'í life in such things as daily prayer, education of children, observance of the laws of Bahá'í marriage, abstention from politics, the obligation to contribute to the Fund, the importance of the Nineteen Day Feast and opportunity to acquire a sound knowledge of the present-day practice of Bahá'í administration.

The onward march of the Faith requires, and is indeed dependent upon, a very great increase in contributions to the various funds. All the goals assigned to the World Center of the Faith, and particularly those dealing with the development and beautification of the properties surrounding the Holy Shrines and the extension of the gardens on Mount Carmel entail heavy expenditures. The building of the two Temples called for in the Plan will require further large sums, and the worldwide process of teaching and consolidation now to be intensified must be sustained by a greatly increased and uninterrupted flow of funds. The International Deputization Fund must be maintained and expanded, not only for further pioneering needs, but in order to assist and develop the traveling teacher program now called for. Since only those who have openly proclaimed their recognition of Bahá'u'lláh are permitted to contribute financially to the establishment of His World Order, it is apparent that more, much more is required from the few now so privileged. Our responsibilities in this field are very great, commensurate indeed with the bounty of being the bearers of the Name of God in this day.

The challenge to the individual Bahá'í in every field of service, but above all in teaching the Cause of God is never-ending. With every fresh affliction visited upon mankind our inescapable duty becomes more apparent, nor should we ever forget that if we neglect this duty, "others" in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world." Now, it seems, we may well be entering an era of the longed-for expansion of our beloved Faith. Mankind's growing hunger for spiritual truth is our opportunity. While reaching forth to grasp it we would do well to ponder the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

> Your behavior towards your neighbor should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be recreated by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory.

As humanity plunges deeper into that condition of which Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly," so must the believers increasingly stand out as assured, orientated and fundamentally happy beings, conforming to a standard which, in direct contrast to the ignoble and amoral attitudes of modern society, is the source of their honor, strength and maturity. It is this marked contrast between the vigor, unity and discipline of the Bahá'í community on the one hand, and the increasing confusion, despair and feverish tempo of a doomed society on the other, which, during the turbulent years ahead will draw the eyes of humanity to the sanctuary of Bahá'u'lláh's world-redeeming Faith.

The constant progress of the Cause of God is a source of joy to us all and a stimulus to further action. But not ordinary action. Heroic deeds are now called for such as are performed only by divinely sustained and detached souls. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Commander of the hosts of the Lord, in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, uttered this cry: "O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions and, raising the call of 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá' in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the Divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How

intensely I deplore it." And He concluded with this heart-shaking appeal, "Please God, ye may achieve it."

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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