THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1967

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At the conclusion of the third year of the Nine Year Plan we acknowledge with thankful hearts the evidences of Divine favor with which Bahá'u'lláh unfailingly sustains and confirms the dedicated efforts of His servants everywhere, and we unhesitatingly affirm our confidence that the community of the Most Great Name can and will, by its determination and sacrificial efforts, achieve complete victory.

Last year the call was raised for the formation, in 1967, of eleven new National Spiritual Assemblies. All will be elected during the Riḍván period. We welcome with great joy the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Algeria and Tunisia with its seat in Algiers; Cameroon Republic with its seat in Victoria; Eswatini, Lesotho and Mozambique with its seat in Mbabane; Zambia with its seat in Lusaka; Belize with its seat in Belize; the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands with its seat in Charlotte Amalie; Eastern and Southern Arabia with its seat in Baḥrayn; Laos with its seat in Vientiane; Sikkim with its seat in Gangtok; Taiwan with its seat in Taipei; the Gilbert and Ellice Islands with its seat in Tarawa. The World Center of the Faith will be represented at each National Convention by a Hand of the Cause of God, who will present a message from the Universal House of Justice welcoming the new national community and assigning it its share of the goals of the Nine Year Plan.

At this Riḍván eighty-one of the 108 National Spiritual Assemblies, and more than six thousand of the 13,737 Local Spiritual Assemblies called for by 1973 will have been established; of a required 54,102 localities where Bahá'ís reside, 28,217 are reported; fifteen of the sixty-five National Incorporations called for have been achieved; seventeen of fifty-two National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, seven of sixty-two Temple sites, thirteen of fifty-four National Endowments, fourteen of thirty-two Teaching Institutes, have been acquired; of the 973 Local Incorporations called for in the Plan, 123 have been completed; Local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds acquired are, twenty-four in India, seventeen in Kenya, nine in Uganda, two in South Africa, two in Turkey and a number in Congo (Kinshasa), while land for eight others has been acquired in Kenya, for four in Cameroon, for two in Pakistan and for one in Mauritius; in eight countries Local Endowments supplementary to those called for in the Plan have been acquired.

Iceland, Korea, Liberia, Luxembourg and Rhodesia now recognize the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate; the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Hawaii, Iceland, Italy, Kenya and Luxembourg recognize Bahá'í Holy Days. A Summer School has been established in Liberia, and one, beyond the requirements of the Plan, in Canada, while land for others has been acquired in Argentina, Ethiopia and Samoa. Twenty-five new languages have been added to the list of those in which Bahá'í literature is available, bringing the total number to 397. The number of territories now opened to the Faith has reached 311, including the recently settled virgin areas of Chiloé Archipelago, Bonaire, Phoenix Islands and St. Martin, and two territories in addition to those called for in the Plan, namely Melville Island in Australasia and Montserrat in the Windward Islands.

After protracted frustration the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia has finally gained possession of the historic fortress of Chihríq, that bleak and lonely citadel which was the last earthly residence of the blessed Báb, and from which He was led forth to His martyrdom in Tabríz. Realization of the long-sought recognition of the Faith in Italy is a wonderful victory, resulting not only in the incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly, but also of all Local Spiritual Assemblies in Italy and the ability to establish that National Spiritual Assembly's Publishing Trust. In Iceland the Faith has been recognized as one of the island's religions. This provides not

only for incorporation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Reykjavik but authorizes the chairman of that Assembly to perform Bahá'í marriages and Bahá'í burials, exempts the Faith from certain taxes, permits the observance of Bahá'í Holy Days and paves the way for incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly of that country when it will be formed. The full number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Groups and Localities called for in the Plan has been established in fifty-three territories and islands under the direction of twenty-six National Spiritual Assemblies; five territories have formed the required number of Local Spiritual Assemblies and seven have reached the specified number of Localities.

Since the call was raised a year ago, international traveling-teaching, ranging over the five continents and affecting nearly all national communities, has been undertaken. Seventy-eight projects have been completed in Europe, forty-three in America, twenty-seven in Asia, twenty-five in Australasia which, with those in Africa brings the total number to about two hundred. It is greatly hoped that this stimulating activity, so dear to the beloved Master's heart, will be constantly expanded.

Sustaining all these visible achievements is a constant activity throughout the world of teaching and administration—a perpetual movement, like the ceaseless surge of the sea, within the Bahá'í community, which is the real cause of its growth. National and Local Spiritual Assemblies facing difficult problems, devising new plans, shouldering responsibility for a community growing in numbers and consciousness, Committees striving to accomplish objectives, Bahá'í Youth in eager and dedicated activity, individual Bahá'ís and families making efforts for the Cause, to give the Message, or hold a fireside, these constant services attract the confirmation of Bahá'u'lláh, and the more they are supported by prayers and intense dedication and the more extensive they become, the more they release into the world a spiritual charge which no force on earth can resist, and which must eventually bring about the complete triumph of the Cause. It is this organic vitality of the Faith, so readily felt at the World Center, whose exhilaration we wish every believer to share.

At the World Center of the Faith codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and collation of other important Texts has continued. Work on the highly important task of formulating the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice is well advanced. Development and extension of the gardens surrounding the sacred Shrines in both Haifa and Bahjí is continuing. Publication of *The Bahá'í World*, Volume 13 has been undertaken; this book covers nine years, from 1954 to 1963, almost the entire period of the Ten Year Crusade, and includes a comprehensive article on the beloved Guardian by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum. A planned development of relationships with the United Nations is being actively pursued. An important supplementary achievement is the establishment of an International Bahá'í Audio-Visual Center whose function is to provide teaching and deepening aids to all National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as to store and index audiovisual records.

Throughout the year the services of the beloved Hands of the Cause have shone with an unfailing light. Their constant encouragement of National Spiritual Assemblies and of believers everywhere to pursue the goals of the Plan and to obtain a deeper understanding of the true meaning of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is contributing in no small measure to the progress of that Plan and must exercise a lasting effect on the development of the Bahá'í community. These few gallant and dedicated believers, whose place in history is forever assured by virtue of their appointment to their high office, are indeed a precious legacy left to us by our beloved Guardian, and as the years go by there is increasingly added to the honor and respect which is their due by reason of their exalted rank, the love and admiration of the friends evoked by their constant services.

In response to special needs two changes have been made in the disposition of the Hands during the year, Hand of the Cause John Robarts returning to the Western Hemisphere with a special assignment to his native Canada, and Hand of the Cause William Sears returning to Africa.

In addition we are delighted to announce that Hand of the Cause Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, whose eyes were blessed by beholding Bahá'u'lláh, will represent the Universal House of Justice at the Intercontinental Conference in Chicago, replacing the late Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas.

In the international sphere the great project of raising the Panama Temple has begun with choice of a design submitted by Mr. Peter Tillotson, an English architect. Mr. Robert McLaughlin, sometime member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Dean Emeritus of the School of Architecture of Princeton University, who served as a member of the Technical Advisory Board for the construction of the interior of the Mother Temple of the West in Wilmette, has been appointed Architectural Consultant to the Universal House of Justice for the building of the Temple. He and Mr. Tillotson have visited the site together, and are working in close cooperation. Pictures and drawings of the new Temple will be published shortly, and the friends will be kept informed of the progress of construction of this House of Worship "situated between the two great oceans," a location which 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated would become very important in the future and whence the Teachings, once established, "will unite the East and the West, the North and the South."

The brilliant pioneering feat of the second year of the Plan is beginning to reveal its beneficent effects, but pioneers are still urgently needed and will continue to be needed in all parts of the world for consolidation and development of the Faith in the newly won territories as well as for those resettled during the opening years of the Plan. The immediate requirement is for 209 pioneers to settle in eighty-seven territories named on the attached list, and the call is now raised for the speedy achievement of this task. Service in this highly meritorious field is open to every believer and all those who are moved to respond to this particular call are asked to consult the list of territories and to make their offers to their own National Spiritual Assembly. Full details of the requirements in each territory have been sent to the National Spiritual Assemblies concerned and to the Pioneer Committees.

The constant need for pioneers no less than the approaching worldwide proclamation render it imperative to pay special attention, in every continent, to the homefronts, for they are the sources of manpower and of administrative experience, the solid bases from which all expansion begins, both at home and abroad. The largest increases in numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies, of Groups, and of believers, are called for on the homefronts, and these tasks must be vigorously pursued. Some National Spiritual Assemblies have phased these important goals, assigning a specified number for achievement each year, thus ensuring a planned and flexible approach to the total requirements. Such a systematic and determined prosecution of the homefront goals is highly recommended.

The pressing and ever-growing needs of the Bahá'í Fund are called to the attention of all believers. There are great projects already under way or lying ahead which require very large amounts of money for their realization. The Panama Temple—the first only of the two called for in the Nine Year Plan—the beautification and development of the World Center itself, involving a necessary and inevitable increase in facilities to serve the growing needs of the Faith; support of the vital teaching program in many parts of the world; establishment and development of new National Spiritual Assemblies—all these urgently require the support of the friends everywhere through sustained and sacrificial contributions. As inflation spreads around the world, the consequent increase in the cost of living is balanced, at least in the more affluent countries, by a corresponding increase in personal incomes. The expenses of the Bahá'í Fund are inevitably and seriously affected by this inflationary condition which can only be relieved by contributions, both of larger amounts and from a larger number of contributors. The House of Justice believes that the financial needs of the Cause should be met by universal participation in giving and urges National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to pursue this goal with vigor and imagination, recalling to the friends the plea of the beloved Guardian to every believer "unhesitatingly, to place, each according

to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Bahá'í sacrifice." The fact that only we, the Bahá'ís, can contribute financially to the Cause is both our honor and our challenge.

As we approach the third phase of the Nine Year Plan there opens before us a prospect of enthralling opportunities such as to thrill the heart of every ardent follower of Bahá'u'lláh. For more than a century we have toiled to teach the Cause; heroic sacrifices, dedicated services, prodigious efforts have been made in order to establish the outposts of the Faith in the chief countries, territories and islands of the earth and to raise the framework of the Administrative Order around the planet. But the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh remains, as yet, unknown to the generality of men. Now at last, at long last, the worldwide community of the Most Great Name is called upon to launch, on a global scale and to every stratum of human society, an enduring and intensive proclamation of the healing message that the Promised One has come and that the unity and well-being of the human race is the purpose of His Revelation. This long-to-be-sustained campaign, commencing next October in commemoration of the centenary of the sounding of the "opening notes" of Bahá'u'lláh's own proclamation, and gathering momentum throughout the remainder of the Nine Year Plan, may well become the spearhead of other plans to be launched continually until humanity has recognized and gratefully acclaimed its Redeemer and its Lord.

A hundred years ago Bahá'u'lláh Himself addressed the kings, rulers, religious leaders and peoples of the world. The Universal House of Justice feels it its bounden duty to bring that Message to the attention of the world's leaders today. It is therefore presenting to them, in the form of a book, the essence of Bahá'u'lláh's announcement. Entitled *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, a special edition will be presented to Heads of State during the opening of the proclamation period and a general edition will be available to the friends in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The Hands of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Ugo Giachery, Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, Paul Haney, Abu'l-Qásim Faizi, who will represent the Universal House of Justice at the Intercontinental Conferences in October to be held in Panama, Sydney, Chicago, Kampala, Frankfurt and New Delhi respectively, will gather at the World Center in September, a few days before the Feast of Mashíyyat. The members of the House of Justice will join these Hands in supplication at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí and will meet with them for consultation in the Mansion. From that Holy Spot these Hands of the Cause will make a special pilgrimage on behalf of the entire Bahá'í world to Adrianople where the Súriy-i-Mulúk was revealed. One hundred years after the historic event which it is their purpose to commemorate, they will, on September 27th gather in the House of Bahá'u'lláh for prayer and meditation, while the members of the Universal House of Justice will, in the Most Holy Shrine at Bahjí, share in the same commemoration and pray for the success of the Conferences and of the Proclamation program. The entire Bahá'í world will, between the Conferences and Riḍván 1968, commemorate the centenary of the opening of that wonderful period in human history when the clouds of Divine bounty showered in lavish profusion their treasures upon men and the portals of the Kingdom were thrown open, disclosing to all who had eyes to see, a new heaven and a new earth, and the new Jerusalem coming down from God.

Immediately after the Feast of Mashíyyat the Hands of the Cause will travel from Adrianople to their Conferences, each bearing the precious trust of a photograph of the Blessed Beauty, which it will be the privilege of those attending the Conferences to view. These distinguished Hands will, on their own behalf, each address the Conference which they attend, and will bear a message to each Conference from the Universal House of Justice whom they represent.

These six Conferences, convened to commemorate the opening of Bahá'u'lláh's own Proclamation and to inaugurate a period of proclamation of His message by the entire company of His followers, will doubtless demonstrate yet again the spirit of joy which pervades such gatherings of the friends and will reinforce them in their determination to seize whatever means and opportunities they may find to raise the Divine call. Honored by the presence of Hands of the

Cause, these Conferences, focal points of the love and prayers of the friends everywhere, magnets to attract the spiritual powers which alone can confirm their work, will, it is confidently hoped, be potent sources of unity, spiritual enthusiasm and realistic planning. National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to ensure that they are represented at the Conference held in their continent so that they may share their plans for proclamation with other National Spiritual Assemblies as well as discuss with them the remaining goals of the Nine Year Plan.

To all those friends in so many countries, suffering in varying degrees from restrictions and oppression which will either prevent altogether, or greatly inhibit their public commemoration and subsequent proclamation programs, we send a special message of love and assurance. To them we convey the love and admiration of their fellow believers, who, in gratitude for their greater freedom, are determined to blaze abroad such a proclamation of the Divine Message as may well pave the way for the eventual emancipation of the entire body of the Faith.

Worldwide proclamation, the unknown sea on which we must soon sail, will add another dimension to our work, a dimension which will, as it develops, complement and reinforce the twin processes of expansion and consolidation. This pattern of teaching, emerging so soon after the completion of the framework of the Administrative Order, may well be the means of advancing the vital work of consolidation and of rendering more effective the teaching wisdom which has been gained in a hundred years, and more particularly since the beloved Guardian called us to systematic and planned activity. Therefore, in those countries where we are free to publicize our religion, this activity must become part of our regular work, included in budgets, assigned to National and Local Committees for study and implementation and above all for coordination with the programs operating to achieve the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Every effort of proclamation must be sustained by teaching, particularly locally where public announcements should be related to such efforts. This coordination is essential, for nothing will be more disheartening than for thousands to hear of the Faith and have nowhere to turn for further information.

The beloved Guardian wrote, "To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents," a statement which places the obligation of deepening in the Cause firmly on every believer. It is therefore upon the nature of deepening, rather than upon the desirability of pursuing it, that we wish to comment.

A detailed and exact knowledge of the present structure of Bahá'í Administration, or of the By-laws of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, or of the many and varied applications of Bahá'í law under the diverse conditions prevailing around the world, while valuable in itself, cannot be regarded as the sort of knowledge primarily intended by deepening. Rather is suggested a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man, and particularly of His immediate purpose as revealed and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, a purpose as far removed from current concepts of human well-being and happiness as is possible. We should constantly be on our guard lest the glitter and tinsel of an affluent society should lead us to think that such superficial adjustments to the modern world as are envisioned by humanitarian movements or are publicly proclaimed as the policy of enlightened statesmanship—such as an extension to all members of the human race of the benefits of a high standard of living, of education, medical care, technical knowledge—will of themselves fulfill the glorious mission of Bahá'u'lláh. Far otherwise. These are the things which shall be added unto us once we seek the Kingdom of God, and are not themselves the objectives for which the Báb gave His life, Bahá'u'lláh endured such sufferings as none before Him had ever endured, the Master and after Him the Guardian bore their trials and afflictions with such superhuman fortitude. Far deeper and more fundamental was their vision, penetrating to the very purpose of human life. We cannot do better, in this respect, than call to the attention of the friends certain themes pursued by Shoghi Effendi in his trenchant statement "The Goal of a New World Order." "The principle of the Oneness of Mankind" he writes, "implies an organic change in

the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced." Referring to the "epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization," he states that "... they cannot but appear, when viewed in their proper perspective, except as subsidiary adjustments preluding that transformation of unparalleled majesty and scope which humanity is in this age bound to undergo." In a later document he refers to the civilization to be established by Bahá'u'lláh as one "with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive."

Dearly loved Friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by "a new race of men"? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study classes for its constant consideration, and as reinforcement to their effort, let them remember conscientiously the requirements of daily prayer and reading of the Word of God enjoined upon all Bahá'ís by Bahá'u'lláh.

Such dedicated striving on the part of all the friends to deepen in the Cause becomes imperative with the approach of the proclamation program. As this becomes effective more and more attention will be directed to the claims of Bahá'u'lláh and opposition must be expected. "HOW GREAT, HOW VERY GREAT IS THE CAUSE!" wrote the Master; "HOW VERY FIERCE THE ONSLAUGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLES AND KINDREDS OF THE EARTH! ERELONG SHALL THE CLAMOR OF THE MULTITUDE THROUGHOUT AFRICA, THROUGHOUT AMERICA, THE CRY OF THE EUROPEAN AND OF THE TURK, THE GROANING OF INDIA AND CHINA BE HEARD FROM FAR AND NEAR. ONE AND ALL THEY SHALL ARISE WITH ALL THEIR POWER TO RESIST HIS CAUSE. THEN SHALL THE KNIGHTS OF THE LORD, ASSISTED BY HIS GRACE FROM ON HIGH, STRENGTHENED BY FAITH, AIDED BY THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING AND REINFORCED BY THE LEGIONS OF THE COVENANT, ARISE AND MAKE MANIFEST THE TRUTH OF THE VERSE: 'BEHOLD THE CONFUSION THAT HATH BEFALLEN THE TRIBES OF THE DEFEATED!'"

Mindful of the countless expressions of Divine love found in our Scriptures and aware of the extraordinary nature of the crisis facing humanity, we call the friends to a new realization of the very great things which are expected from us in this Day. We recall that the Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh, as well as His "Best-Beloved" before Him and 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him bore Their sufferings in this world in order that mankind might be freed from material fetters and "attain unto true liberty," "might prosper and flourish," "attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness," and we pray that the endeavors of the friends may be the means by which this glory and felicity will speedily come to pass.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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