

The Universal House of Justice

August 1968

To the Hands of the Cause of God and the Bahá'í Friends assembled in Palermo, Sicily, at the First Bahá'í Oceanic Conference

Dearly loved Friends,

The event which we commemorate at this first Bahá'í Oceanic Conference is unique. Neither the migration of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the region of Aleppo, nor the journey of Moses towards the Promised Land, nor the flight into Egypt of Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus, nor yet the Hegira of Muḥammad can compare with the voyage made by God's Supreme Manifestation one hundred years ago from Gallipoli to the Most Great Prison. Bahá'u'lláh's voyage was forced upon Him by the two despots who were His chief adversaries in a determined attempt to extirpate once and for all His Cause, and the decree of His fourth banishment came when the tide of His prophetic utterance was in full flood. The proclamation of His Message to mankind had begun; the sun of His majesty had reached its zenith and, as attested by the devotion of His followers, the respect of the population and the esteem of officials and the representatives of foreign powers, His ascendancy had become manifest. At such a time He was confronted with the decree of final exile to a remote, obscure and pestilential outpost of the decrepit Turkish empire.

Bahá'u'lláh knew, better than His royal persecutors, the magnitude of the crisis, with all its potentiality for disaster, which confronted Him. Consigned to a prison cell, debarred from access to those to whom His Message must be addressed, cut off from His followers save for the handful who were to accompany Him, and deprived even of association with them, it was apparent that by all earthly standards the ship of His Cause must founder, His mission wither and die.

But it was the Lord of Hosts with Whom they were dealing. Knowing the sufferings which faced Him His one thought was to instill confidence and fortitude into His followers, to whom He immediately dispatched sublime Tablets asserting the power of His Cause to overcome all opposition. "Should they attempt to conceal its light on the continent," is one of His powerful utterances on this theme, "it will assuredly rear its head in the midmost heart of the ocean, and, raising its voice, proclaim 'I am the lifegiver of the world!'" All the afflictions which men could heap upon Him were thrown back from the rock of His adamantine will like spray from the ocean. His patient submission to the affronts of men, His fortitude, His divine genius transformed the somber notes of disaster into the diapason of triumph. At the nadir of His worldly fortunes He raised His standard of victory above the Prison City and poured forth upon mankind the healing balm of His laws and ordinances revealed in His Most Holy Book. "Until our time," comments 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "no such thing has ever occurred."

Contemplating this awe-inspiring, supernal episode, we may obtain a clearer understanding of our own times, a more confident view of their outcome and a deeper apprehension of the part we are called upon to play. That the violent disruption which has seized the entire planet is beyond the ability of men to assuage, unaided by God's revelation, is a truth repeatedly and forcibly set forth in our Writings. The old order cannot be repaired; it is being rolled up before our eyes. The moral decay and disorder convulsing human society must run their course; we can neither arrest nor divert them.

Our task is to build the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social or educational programs, let us, with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and sheltered within its impregnable stronghold, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, demonstrate the Bahá'í way of life. Wherever a Bahá'í community

exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present-day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world's gloom deepens the light of Bahá'í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.

The great sea, on one of whose chief islands you are now gathered, within whose hinterland and islands have flourished the Jewish, the Christian and Islamic civilizations is a befitting scene for the first Oceanic Bahá'í Conference. Two millenniums ago, in this arena, the disciples of Christ performed such deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice as are remembered to this day and are forever enshrined in the annals of His Cause. A thousand years later the lands, bordering the southern and western shores of this sea witnessed the glory of Islam's Golden Age.

In the day of the Promised One this same sea achieved eternal fame through its association with the Heroic and Formative Ages of His Cause. It bore upon its bosom the King of kings Himself; the Center of His Covenant crossed and recrossed it in the course of His epoch-making journeys to the West, during which He left the indelible imprint of His presence upon European and African lands; the Sign of God on earth frequently journeyed upon it. It enshrines within its depths the mortal remains of the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker and around its shores lies the dust of apostles, martyrs and pioneers. Forty-six Knights of Bahá'u'lláh are identified with seven of its islands and five of its territories. Through such and many other episodes, Mediterranean lands—ancient home of civilizations—have been endowed with spiritual potentiality to dissolve the encrustations of those once glorious but now moribund social orders and to radiate once again the light of Divine guidance.

Through dedicated, heroic and sacrificial deeds during the course of the beloved Guardian's ministry, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh was established in this area. Eight pillars of the Universal House of Justice were raised, the first of an even larger number to be established now and during the course of future plans, to include, as envisioned by Shoghi Effendi, National Spiritual Assemblies in major islands of that historic sea.

The timing of such exciting developments is dependent upon the outcome of the Nine Year Plan. At this midway point of that Plan, although great strides have been made, more than half the goals are still to be won. The greatest deficiencies are in the opening of new centers where Bahá'ís reside and the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies, which inevitably affects the ability to establish National Spiritual Assemblies. A dramatic upsurge of teaching—effective teaching—is necessary to make up the leeway; pioneers are needed, teachers must travel, funds must be provided. It is our hope that there will be engendered at this Conference, through your enthusiasm, prayers and spirit of devotion, a great spiritual dynamic to reinforce that grand momentum which, mounting steadily during the next four years, must carry the community of the Most Great Name to overwhelming victory in 1973.

Dear friends, within a few short days the observance of the Centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Holy Land will take place. The hearts and minds of the entire Bahá'í world will be focused on the Most Holy Shrine, where those privileged to attend this commemoration will circumambulate that Holy Spot and raise their prayers to the Lord of the Age. Let them remember their fellow-believers at home and supplicate from the depths of their souls for such bounties and favors to descend upon the friends of God everywhere as to cause them to rise as one man to demonstrate their love for Him Who suffered for them, by such deeds of sacrifice and devotion as shall outshine the deeds of the past and sweep away every obstacle from the onward march of the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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