

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1969

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The continued progress of the Cause of God stands in vivid contrast to the chronic unrest afflicting human society, a contrast which the events of the past year, both within and without the Faith, have only served to intensify. Amidst the disintegration of the old order the Cause of God has pursued its majestic course, extending the range of its activities and influence and accomplishing a further development of its administrative system.

Opening with the convening, in the Holy Land, of the Second International Convention for the election of the Universal House of Justice, the year has witnessed a remarkable activity in the Cause. The most significant and far-reaching development was undoubtedly the appointment of the eleven Continental Boards of Counselors, which fulfilled the goal of the Nine Year Plan calling for the development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation. This step, taken after full consultation with the Hands of the Cause, has, at one and the same time, strongly reinforced the activities of that Institution and made it possible for the Hands themselves to extend the range of their individual services beyond the continental sphere, thereby making universally available to the friends the love, the wisdom and the spirit of dedication animating the Guardian's appointees. We wish to pay tribute at this time to the exemplary manner in which the Counselors, under the guidance of the Hands, have embarked upon their high duties.

In August, the first Oceanic Bahá'í Conference, held in Palermo, commemorated Bahá'u'lláh's voyage on the Mediterranean Sea on His way to the Most Great Prison. Attendants at this Conference came immediately afterwards to the Qiblih of their Faith to pay homage at the Shrine of its Founder and to commemorate with deep awareness of its spiritual import the long prophesied arrival of the Lord of Hosts on the shores of the Holy Land. This gathering of more than two thousand believers presented an inexpressibly poignant contrast to the actual arrival of Bahá'u'lláh one hundred years before, rejected by the rulers of this earth and derided by the local populace. Such is the conquering power of His Message, such is the undefeatable might of the King of Kings.

That same message is now being proclaimed by His followers from end to end of the world. Already one hundred and twenty-two Heads of State have been presented with the special edition of *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, and copies have been received by thousands more officials and leaders.

Taking full advantage of the designation of 1968 as Human Rights Year by the United Nations, Bahá'í communities throughout the world have not only strengthened the ties between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations, but have at the same time proclaimed the Faith and its healing message. In country after country the Cause has been featured for the first time in modern mass communications media. The volume of this call to the peoples of the world is increasing day by day and must so continue, penetrating every stratum of society, until the conclusion of the Plan and beyond.

As a stimulus and aid to this vital work as well as to the promotion of all the goals of the Plan, we announce the holding between August 1970 and September 1971 of a series of eight Oceanic and Continental Conferences, as follows: La Paz, Bolivia, and Rose Hill, Mauritius, in

August 1970; Monrovia, Liberia, and Djakarta, Indonesia, in January 1971; Suva, Fiji, and Kingston, Jamaica, in May 1971; Sapporo, Japan, and Reykjavik, Iceland, in September 1971.

A review of the progress of the Nine Year Plan discloses that great strides have been made in the acquisition of Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, Temple sites and Teaching Institutes, in translation of Bahá'í literature into more languages and in the incorporation of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. The site of the Panama Temple has been prepared for construction which will begin as soon as final plans and specifications and the placing of the contract have been approved.

As a result of the accelerated pace of expansion and consolidation which has been initiated, and which, if fostered and fed, will become a full tide of victorious achievement, we joyfully announce the formation of twelve more National Spiritual Assemblies, two during Riḍván 1969: the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Burundi and Rwanda with its seat in Bujumbura and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Papua and New Guinea with its seat in Lae, and ten during Riḍván 1970: six in Africa, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of the Congo Republic (Kinshasa); Ghana; Dahomey, Togo and Niger; Malawi; Botswana; and Gambia, Senegal, Portuguese Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands; one in the Americas, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Guianas; one in Asia, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Near East; and two in Australasia, the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Tonga and the Cook Islands; and Samoa. Thus at Riḍván 1970 the number of National Spiritual Assemblies will be raised to ninety-three.

In harmony with the worldwide growth of the Cause the World Center of the Faith is also developing rapidly. The pilgrims, the beloved Guardian has said, are the lifeblood of this World Center and it has long been our cherished hope and desire to be able to grant the bounty of pilgrimage to the Holy Land to all who can avail themselves of it. It is therefore with great joy that we now find it possible to open the door of pilgrimage to a much greater number of believers. Beginning in October of this year the size of each group of friends to be invited will be quadrupled and the number of groups each year will be increased so that nearly six times the present number of pilgrims will have the opportunity each year to pray in the Shrines of the Central Figures of their Faith, to visit the places hallowed by the footsteps, sufferings and triumphs of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to meditate in the tranquillity of these sacred precincts, beautified with so much loving care by our beloved Guardian.

This increased flow of pilgrims will greatly augment the spiritual development of the Bahá'í World Community which now, after five years of strenuous labor and bearing the laurels of outstanding victories, is entering the fourth phase of the Nine Year Plan.

The great, the most pressing need, at this stage of the Plan, is a rapid increase in the number of believers, and a major advance in the opening of the additional localities as well as in the formation of the well-grounded Local Spiritual Assemblies called for in the Plan. This worldwide activity, the hallmark of the fourth phase of the Plan, answering the tremendous opportunities offered by the present condition of mankind, will be strongly reinforced by the continuance of proclamation, is the essential foundation for the erection of the remaining National Spiritual Assemblies, and will increasingly witness to the benefits of international traveling teaching and inter-Assembly cooperation. Above all, it requires a sacrificial outpouring by the friends of contributions in support of the Funds of the Faith, and the raising up of a mighty host of pioneers.

During the second year of the Plan the Bahá'í world achieved its greatest feat of organized pioneering when a total of five hundred and five believers arose to settle in the unopened and weakly held territories of the earth. This magnificent achievement must now be surpassed. The call is raised for seven hundred and thirty-three believers to leave their homes and settle in territories of the globe in dire need of pioneer support or as yet unopened to the Faith. These devoted believers, who should arise without delay, are needed to settle, during the fourth phase of the Plan, in 184 specified territories of the globe: 48 in Africa, 40 in the Americas, 40 in Asia, 18 in

Australasia and 38 in Europe. Although primary responsibility has been assigned to those national Bahá'í communities most able to provide pioneers, all should ponder in their hearts whether they too cannot respond to this call, either by going themselves or by deputizing, in response to Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, those who can go in their stead. Detailed information is being sent to National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that this vital mobilization of Bahá'í warriors is accomplished as quickly as possible.

Beloved Friends, the Nine Year Plan is well advanced, our work is blessed by the never-ceasing confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, and the entire Bahá'í World Community is committed to complete victory. That happy consummation, now faintly discernible on the far horizon, will be reached through hard work, realistic planning, sacrificial deeds, intensification of the teaching work and, above all, through constant endeavor on the part of every single Bahá'í to conform his inner life to that glorious ideal set for mankind by Bahá'u'lláh and exemplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In contemplating the Master's divine example we may well reflect that His life and deeds were not acted to a pattern of expediency, but were the inevitable and spontaneous expression of His inner self. We, likewise, shall act according to His example only as our inward spirits, growing and maturing through the disciplines of prayer and practice of the Teachings, become the wellsprings of all our attitudes and actions. This will promote the accomplishment of God's purpose; this will ensure the triumph of His Faith and enable us to build up the present motion of the Cause into a grand momentum whose force will carry the community of the Most Great Name to glorious victory in 1973 and onwards to the as yet unapprehended vistas of the Most Great Peace.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]