

The Universal House of Justice

26 May 1969

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have reviewed your letter of April 11th, asking about the teachings of the Faith on self-defense and any guidance on individual conduct in the face of increasing civil disorder in North American cities.

From the texts you already have available it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that it is preferable to be killed in the path of God's good pleasure than to kill, and that organized religious attack against Bahá'ís should never turn into any kind of warfare, as this is strictly prohibited in our Writings.

A hitherto untranslated Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, points out that in the case of attack by robbers and highwaymen, a Bahá'í should not surrender himself, but should try, as far as circumstances permit, to defend himself, and later on lodge a complaint with the government authorities. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, he also indicates that in an emergency when there is no legal force at hand to appeal to, a Bahá'í is justified in defending his life. In another letter the Guardian has further pointed out that the assault of an irresponsible assailant upon a Bahá'í should be resisted by the Bahá'í, who would be justified, under such circumstances, in protecting his life.

The House of Justice does not wish at the present time to go beyond the guidelines given in the above-mentioned statements. The question is basically a matter of conscience, and in each case the Bahá'í involved must use his judgment in determining when to stop in self-defense lest his action deteriorate into retaliation.

Of course the above principles apply also in cases when a Bahá'í finds himself involved in situations of civil disorder. We have, however, advised the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States that under the present circumstances in that country it is preferable that Bahá'ís do not buy nor own arms for their protection or the protection of their families.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]