

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Naw-Rúz 1974

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

To supplement the message which is being addressed to each of your Communities giving its specific goals under the Five Year Plan, we now share with you a number of elucidations. Certain of the paragraphs which follow may apply to goals which have not been allotted to your community, but it will no doubt be of interest to you to read them in relation to the worldwide scope of the Plan.

When choosing localities to be opened to the Faith and when deciding which localities should have Local Spiritual Assemblies, you should bear in mind the need to have the Bahá'í community represented broadly across the area under your jurisdiction. It is likely that some areas will show themselves particularly receptive and numerous Bahá'í communities will speedily arise there, but while fostering such growth you should not neglect those areas in which the Faith is as yet unrepresented.

The institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly is of primary importance in the firm establishment of the Faith, and we hope that you will give particular attention to ensuring that as many as possible, and in increasing numbers, are, in the words of the beloved Guardian, "broad-based, securely grounded" and "efficiently functioning."

The time has come, we believe, when increasing numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies should assume responsibility for helping the teaching work of groups, isolated believers, and other Spiritual Assemblies in their neighborhood. Such extension teaching goals should be assigned by the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its teaching committees, or can be spontaneously adopted by Local Spiritual Assemblies, and should be carried out within the framework of the overall teaching plans of the country. It should also be made clear that by being given such goals a Spiritual Assembly is not being given any jurisdiction over believers outside its area, still less over other Local Spiritual Assemblies, but is being called upon to collaborate with them in their work.

The Five Year Plan does not include specific goals for the recognition of Bahá'í marriage certificates or of Bahá'í Holy Days because, in most countries where these goals are not already won, achievement depends upon circumstances beyond our control. Nevertheless, National Spiritual Assemblies should bear in mind the need to increase recognition of the Faith and should be alert to possibilities of winning these goals where they are as yet unattained.

There are a number of national incorporation goals of the Nine Year Plan towards the attainment of which considerable progress has already been made. These have not been included as goals of the Five Year Plan although they are still pending, but of course they should be pursued to completion.

If acquisition of a National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds is a responsibility assigned to you under the Five Year Plan, you should treat it as an urgent matter in view of the worldwide condition of inflation and rising property costs. Such a building, which must be suitable to serve as the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly, should be purchased as economically as possible. Preferably it should be a freehold detached building, although if such is not obtainable, a semidetached house or an apartment may be considered, or even a property on a long-term lease.

A site for a future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can be as small as 8,000 square meters in area if a larger property would be too expensive. It should, if possible, be situated within the city designated or, if

this is not feasible, within 25 kilometers from the city.

A national endowment should be regarded as an investment in real estate owned by the National Spiritual Assembly. It may be anywhere in the country and can be a small, inexpensive piece of land donated by one of the friends, or else acquired out of the resources of the National Fund.

Where we have given a goal to acquire a Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds which is to serve the entire community in a certain country, it is to be a local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds at the present time but should be of a size and quality to serve as an administrative center and focal point for the whole community. We envisage that some of such Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds may, at a later date, be converted into National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, and this fact should be borne in mind when acquiring them.

In the goal for local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds given to some communities we state that a certain number should be large enough to accommodate activities of a number of communities in the surrounding district. While not being at all in the same category as the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds described in the last paragraph above, these particular buildings are intended to be rather more substantial structures than the average local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, and should be located in areas which form easily accessible, central gathering places for districts in which large numbers of Bahá'ís are living. In addition to serving as a local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds for its own town or village, such a building can be used for district gatherings, for the holding of teaching institutes, conferences, deepening classes, etc., for the larger area, and could possibly accommodate the office of the district teaching committee.

In general we intend that the local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds called for in the Plan should be very simple structures to serve as focal points and meeting places for the local communities. It is hoped that land for them can be provided by local believers and that they can be built, for the most part, by the local friends. In certain instances the National Spiritual Assembly may feel justified in giving a small amount of assistance from the National Fund.

The acquisition of local endowments, which is given as a specific goal to some national communities, is intended to assist in the consolidation of local communities and to foster the spirit of unity and collaboration among the believers. A local endowment can be quite a small piece of land; it can be purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly or is more usually the gift of one or more of the believers. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is incorporated, the endowment should be registered in its name, but if it is not, the endowment can be held by one or more of the believers on behalf of the community. For example, if one of the believers gives a small piece of land he can continue to hold it in his name, but it will be known that he does so on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly and that the land will in time be transferred legally to the Assembly when that is possible. In some countries land is owned by the state or the tribe and only the use of the land can be assigned; in such places the goal can be considered achieved if the Local Spiritual Assembly can obtain the use of a plot of land in its own name. In some countries, even if the land can be purchased, government regulations require that within a specific time a building must be erected on land held by religious institutions. This problem can be met in several ways: it may be possible for the Spiritual Assembly to obtain the use of, or acquire, a plot of land for agricultural purposes, thus avoiding the need to erect a building; or if the most practical course is to erect on the land a Bahá'í institution such as a local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, the Assembly could, in its own records, demarcate a portion of the land to be the endowment, distinct from the portion on which the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds stands.

One of the characteristics of Bahá'í society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings would fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of

the Teachings if such gatherings could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory, but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually.

The holding of regular national teaching conferences has proved to be a valuable stimulus to the work in a number of countries, as well as a means for forging more strongly the bonds of unity among the believers. Beyond this, many national communities are presented with a special opportunity to hold a highly effective teaching conference at the time of the eight Intercontinental Conferences which are being called at the midway point of the Plan. Believers traveling to and from these Intercontinental Conferences are likely to be eager to assist the work in the countries through which they pass. Therefore, if you hold a national conference shortly after the Intercontinental Conference which is nearest to you, it may well be attended by believers from other lands who will bring with them the spirit of that Conference, and, by augmenting the numbers attending your national conference will greatly assist its effectiveness as a means of proclaiming the Faith and enthusing those believers who will have been unable to attend the Intercontinental Conferences.

Bahá'í youth should be encouraged to think of their studies and of their training for a trade or profession as part of their service to the Cause of God and in the context of a lifetime that will be devoted to advancing the interests of the Faith. At the same time, during their years of study, youth are often able to offer specific periods of weeks or months, or even of a year or more, during which they can devote themselves to travel teaching or to serving the Bahá'í community in other ways, such as conducting children's classes in remote villages. They should be encouraged to offer such service, which will in itself be admirable experience for the future, and the National Assembly should instruct an appropriate committee to receive such offers and to organize their implementation so as to derive the greatest possible advantage from them.

A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries, is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Bahá'í community.

Enclosed with this letter you will receive a list of pioneer assistance initially called for at the opening of the Plan. Any National Spiritual Assembly which has pioneers abroad from previous plans is still responsible for helping them to remain at their posts, or for replacing them, if the services they have been rendering are still needed. However, if you have any still unfilled pioneer goals from the Nine Year Plan or from the current year, you may consider them canceled, because such unfilled goals have been taken into consideration in assigning the goals of the Five Year Plan. Best results can be obtained when pioneer projects are arranged in consultation between the sending and receiving National Spiritual Assemblies or their appropriate committees.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]