

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

July 1976

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh gathered at the International Teaching Conference in Helsinki

Dearly loved Friends,

With eager hearts we hail the convocation of this first of the twin Arctic Conferences inaugurating the series of eight International Bahá'í Conferences to be held during the middle part of the Five Year Plan. The northern regions of the world were alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of this Revelation. Their names were recorded in the Tablets of the Divine Plan by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who, in one of His other Tablets, supplicated God to "raise up sanctified, pure and spiritual souls in the countries of the West and the territories of the North, and make them signs of His guidance, ensigns of the Concourse on High and angels of the Abhá Kingdom." These lands received the constant attention of Shoghi Effendi, who repeatedly urged the friends to carry the Faith to their uttermost inhabited areas, and who joyfully announced every advance of the Bahá'ís that established a center closer to the North Pole.

Already touched by the morning light of God's Cause by the nineteen-twenties, the lands of the North were blessed by visits from the indomitable Martha Root, whose love warmed and encouraged the hearts of the handful of believers then laboring in a few scattered centers in Scandinavia and illumined the soul of Hólmfríður Árnadóttir, Iceland's first Bahá'í. Bursting into blossom under the impact of the rays of the second Seven Year Plan, these communities received a major impetus from the Ten Year Crusade, of which the European campaign was launched at the never-to-be-forgotten conference in Stockholm in 1953, and which established centers as far north as Thule in Greenland and Sassen in the islands of Spitzbergen. Yet another stage of growth was reached with the Nine Year Plan and the convocation of the North Atlantic Conference in Reykjavik, which marked the opening of a new phase in the collaboration between the northern communities on both sides of that ocean.

Only thirty-eight years have passed since Väinö Rissanen, the first Bahá'í in Finland, accepted with radiant heart the life-giving message brought to him by Josephine Kruka, the "Mother of Finland," in July 1938, and now the city of Helsinki, the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Finland, is the scene of an International Bahá'í Conference whose deliberations are focused on the diffusion of the light of God's Faith throughout the entire arctic and subarctic regions of the world.

The followers of the Blessed Perfection gathered in Helsinki must direct their attention to the urgent tasks of the second half of the Five Year Plan: to the reopening of Spitzbergen; the winning of the 34 Local Spiritual Assemblies still to be formed in Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland; the acceleration of the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature; the forging of still closer links of collaboration with the Bahá'í communities of Alaska, Canada and in the continent of Europe; the enlistment under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh of increasing numbers of the Eskimo, Lapp and Gypsy peoples; and the pursuit of the vital and challenging objectives of the Plan beyond the frontiers of their homelands.

It is our fervent prayer at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh that this Conference will produce an upsurge of Bahá'í activity throughout the northern lands and in the islands of the North Sea and the Baltic that will outshine every achievement made in those promising regions, and be an inspiration to your fellow-believers in every country of the world.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

