

The Universal House of Justice

26 September 1976

To the Friends gathered at the International Conference in Nairobi

Beloved Friends,

The flames of enthusiasm which ignited the hearts of the followers and lovers of the Most Great Name in Helsinki, in Anchorage and in Paris are now being kindled in a city which occupies a central and envied position at the very crossroads of the vast African mainland and are destined to illumine its horizons. This Conference marking the imminent approach of the midway point of the Five Year Plan which coincides with the anniversary of the birth of the Blessed Báb, will no doubt go down in Bahá'í history as a further landmark in the irresistible march of events which have characterized the impact of the Faith of God upon that continent.

We recall that in addition to Quddús the only other companion of the Báb on His pilgrimage to Mecca was an Ethiopian, and that he and his wife were intimately associated with Him and His household in Shiraz. During the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh a few of His stalwart disciples reached the northeastern shores of Africa, and under His direct guidance, announced the glad tidings of the New Day to the people of the Nile, thus opening to the Faith two countries of the African mainland. Soon afterwards, His blessed person approached those shores in the course of His exile to the Holy Land. Still later He voiced His significant utterance in which He compared the colored people to "the black pupil of the eye," through which "the light of the spirit shineth forth." Just over six years after His ascension, the first member of the black race to embrace His Cause in the West, who was destined to become a disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a herald of the Kingdom, and the door through which numberless members of his race were to enter that Kingdom, came on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the first group of Western friends who arrived in 'Akká to visit the Center of the Covenant. This was followed by a steady extension of the teaching work among the black people of North America, and the opening to the Faith, by the end of the Heroic Age, of two more countries in Africa, under the watchful care of the Master, Whose three visits to Egypt have blessed the soil of that Continent. Prior to the conclusion of the first Bahá'í century the number of countries opened to the Faith had been raised to seven, and the teaching work among the black race in North America had entered a new phase of development through the continuous guidance flowing from the pen of Shoghi Effendi, who himself traversed the African continent twice from south to north, and who, in the course of his ministry, elevated two members of the black race to the rank of Hand of the Cause, appointed three more believers residing in Africa to that high office, and there raised up four National Spiritual Assemblies.

At the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade the number of countries opened to the Faith had reached twenty-four, including those opened under the aegis of the Two Year African Campaign coordinated by the British National Spiritual Assembly. The Ten Year Plan opened the rest of Africa to the light of God's Faith, and today we see with joy and pride in that vast continent and its neighboring islands the establishment of four Boards of Counselors, thirty-four National Spiritual Assemblies—firm pillars of God's Administrative Order—and over 2800 Local Spiritual Assemblies, nuclei of a growing Bahá'í society.

Africa, a privileged continent with a past rich in cherished associations, has reached its present stage of growth through countless feats of heroism and dedication. Before us unfolds the vision of the future. "Africa," the beloved Guardian assures us in one of the letters written on his behalf, "is truly awakening and finding herself, and she undoubtedly has a great message to give, and a great contribution to make

to the advancement of world civilization. To the degree to which her peoples accept Bahá'u'lláh will they be blessed, strengthened and protected.”

The realization of this glorious destiny requires that the immediate tasks be worthily discharged, and the pressing challenges and urgent requirements of the Five Year Plan be wholeheartedly and effectively met and satisfied. As the forces of darkness in that part of the world wax fiercer, and the problems facing its peoples and tribes become more critical, the believers in that continent must evince greater cohesion, scale loftier heights of heroism and self-sacrifice and demonstrate higher standards of concerted effort and harmonious development.

During the brief thirty months separating us from the end of the Plan, Africa must once again distinguish itself among its sister continents through a vast increase in the number of its believers, its Local Spiritual Assemblies and its localities opened to the Faith, and by accelerating the process of entry by troops throughout its length and breadth. The deepening of the faith, of the understanding and of the spiritual life of its individual believers must gather greater momentum; the foundations of its existing Local Spiritual Assemblies must be more speedily consolidated; the number of local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and of local endowments called for in the Plan must be soon acquired; the Bahá'í activities of women and of youth must be systematically stimulated; the Bahá'í education of the children of the believers must continuously be encouraged; the basis of the recognition that the institutions of the Faith have succeeded in obtaining from the authorities must steadily be broadened; mass communication facilities must be used far more frequently to teach and proclaim the Faith; and the publication and dissemination of the essential literature of the Faith must be given much greater importance. Above all it is imperative that in ever greater measure each individual believer should realize the vital need to subordinate his personal advantages to the overall welfare of the Cause, to awaken and reinforce his sense of responsibility before God to promote and protect its vital interests at all costs, and to renew his total consecration and dedication to His glorious Faith, so that, himself enkindled with the flames of its holy fire, he may, in concert with his fellow-believers, ignite the light of faith and certitude in the hearts of his family, his tribe, his countrymen and all the peoples of that mighty continent, in preparation for the day when Africa's major contribution to world civilization will become fully consummated.

We fervently pray at the Holy Shrines that these hopes and aspirations may soon come true, and that the “pure-hearted” and “spiritually receptive” people of Africa may draw ever nearer to the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh, and may become shining examples of self-abnegation, of courage and of love to the supporters of the Most Great Name in every land.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]