

The Universal House of Justice

2 December 1976

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 12 October 1976 proposing the establishment of an International Human Development Center has caused us concern for a number of reasons. It is true that in our letter of 23 December 1975 we stated: "We feel that it is for your Assembly to decide what methods should be employed to bring about the desired result," but your present proposals are a great enlargement and development of the concepts outlined in your letter of 5 December 1975 and involve the establishment of an institution with international ramifications requiring financial assistance from beyond the confines of your own community.

We are acutely aware of the varied problems of community and character development that the American Bahá'í community faces. They are problems that in varying ways and to different degrees face every Bahá'í community in the world. In many countries they are further complicated by grinding poverty, widespread illiteracy, religious persecution or compulsory political indoctrination.

As you quite correctly observe, Bahá'í Administration should make use of whatever expertise or appropriate instruments are available, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, for the attainment of its objectives. But this is not the same as establishing a quasi-Bahá'í institution under Bahá'í auspices based on one particular theory. It is far too early in the development of the Faith and of the social sciences for the Administrative Order thus to promote one particular system or theory of education. A similar situation exists in the field of psychology. As you are well aware, many people come into the Faith needing psychiatric treatment, and it is often very difficult for them to find a psychiatrist who will not urge them to some course of behavior which is contrary to the teachings of the Faith. There are a number of Bahá'í psychologists and psychiatrists who are endeavoring to develop their skills in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and use can certainly be made of their services where available—but it would be premature to consider establishing a Bahá'í School of Psychology....

The grave problems faced by Bahá'í parents and children, when the children must attend schools that are strongly influenced by the degradation of present-day society, are fully appreciated. However, the only ways to completely overcome these dangers would seem to be either to effect a reform of the entire non-Bahá'í educational system or to provide a worldwide network of Bahá'í schools. Both ways are very long-term projects beyond the capacity of the Bahá'í community at this time. Already, of course, Bahá'í communities are establishing primary or tutorial schools in many parts of the world, but these are small and few in number and are located where there are such conditions as general illiteracy among the believers or where no other schools are available to them. Undoubtedly, in time, this process will gain momentum, and Bahá'í schools of ever higher quality and scope will be established in country after country, as has already occurred in India, but necessarily, this must now be a gradual process related, among other things, to the resources of the community, the number of Bahá'í children needing education, and the availability of other suitable schools. Perhaps in certain parts of the United States there are sufficiently large concentrations of Bahá'í children to make the running of a private Bahá'í school feasible—such a proposal has, indeed, been made by a number of individual believers in Alaska, principally teachers, but we stressed in that instance that, if implemented, it should be conducted as a private venture and that the people concerned should give very careful consideration to all the factors involved before initiating it; furthermore we pointed out to them their opportunities for improving the schools in which they themselves worked.

Failing a nationwide system of Bahá'í schools, the establishment of which is clearly out of the question at this stage of the growth of the Cause in the United States, Bahá'í parents will continue to be faced with the problems caused by the exposure of their children to irreligious and immoral attitudes, behavior, and even instruction, from their fellow pupils and their teachers. This is a great challenge to Bahá'í parents, to the Bahá'í children themselves, and to the Spiritual Assemblies. It was to assist in meeting such challenges that we recently issued the compilation of Bahá'í prayers for children and that on Bahá'í education. Your Assembly is correct in its view that a major effort will have to be exerted to raise the number and quality of Bahá'í children's classes, and to assist Bahá'í parents to bring up their children as firm Bahá'ís able to withstand the moral and spiritual poisons and temptations of the society around them....

In addition to the specific problems of child education, you instance the difficulties of local communities which are faced with the task of reorienting and integrating into the Cause new believers who enter with all sorts of immoral and even criminal tendencies from their former life. This is indeed difficult, but this is the very stuff of the work of the Cause. The Bahá'í Faith not only provides teachings in accordance with which the behavior of human beings can be reformed, but also makes available a spiritual power which reinforces the devoted efforts of every believer, whether veteran or neophyte. Arising to serve the Cause has, itself, a transforming effect upon believers, as the beloved Guardian wrote with respect to service upon Spiritual Assemblies: "If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we arise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power." Thus, what is most imperative for the promotion of the spiritual life of local Bahá'í communities is the stimulation of the believers to increase their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, their absolute reliance upon Him and upon His love, and their determination to apply His teachings in every aspect of their lives. This stimulation can be conveyed from heart to heart and mind to mind by devoted Bahá'ís without the need of formal training....

As we pointed out previously, you have already initiated excellent programs; we continually receive evidence of the enthusiasm with which they have been received by local communities in the United States. You should persevere with these programs, expanding and supplementing them as necessary with others that you may judge desirable for the work of the Cause in the conditions of each of the widely diverse areas of your vast national territory. One of the most potent aids to the consolidation of local communities and Assemblies and the deepening of the faith of the believers, is the services of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants. Here is an institution of the Faith, reaching into every locality, composed of firm believers who know the area they have to serve and are familiar with its problems and potentialities—an institution expressly designed to encourage and reinforce the work of the Spiritual Assemblies, to enthuse the believers, to stimulate them to study the Teachings and apply them in their lives—a body of Bahá'ís whose efforts and services will complement and support the work being done by your committees and by the Local Assemblies themselves in every sphere of Bahá'í endeavor....

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]