

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Naw-Rúz 1979

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

In the message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world and in its letters to individual communities setting the goals of the first phase of the Seven Year Plan are a number of references which it wishes to amplify for your guidance. Not all will apply to every national Bahá'í community, but you will all undoubtedly find interest in reading even those which do not immediately apply to your specific situation. The points we have been asked to set forth are as follows.

Local Spiritual Assemblies

In August 1970 the House of Justice sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies a compilation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on the Local Spiritual Assembly. To supplement this fundamental and most important guidance we now enclose a compilation of extracts from the letters of the Universal House of Justice written between 1966 and 1975, covering the importance of Local Spiritual Assemblies, their development, the supporting role of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and suggested goals for Local Assemblies.

In selecting goal towns for the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies a National Assembly should ensure that there will be a wide distribution of Local Assemblies throughout the country.

National Assemblies should consider calling upon every Local Assembly to meet at least once every Bahá'í month, and to appoint a local teaching committee wherever it is desirable to do so and has not already been done.

Pioneers and Traveling Teachers

The need for the services of pioneers and traveling teachers remains very great. In the goals for the initial two-year phase of the Plan few specific assignments for the sending of pioneers and traveling teachers have been made. In recent years a steady stream has begun to flow, and the Universal House of Justice calls upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the stronger national communities to arise to join this stream. Enclosed are two lists showing those countries which are particularly in need of pioneers and traveling teachers at the present time. You should publish these as soon as possible. They are also being supplied to the Continental Pioneer Committees, and those friends who arise will be able to decide upon their area of service in consultation with their National Assembly and the appropriate committees. The international funds of the Faith are now very limited, and this adds to the need for pioneers and traveling teachers to be self-supporting.

Youth Teaching

Experience has shown that youth can render valuable service in many activities of the community, and particularly in taking the message to the members of their own generation. Those in schools and universities have many opportunities to teach their fellow students and faculty members, and many can be particularly effective by attending a school or university in a pioneer goal. During vacations youth can often render outstanding services as traveling teachers. Traveling in teams has been very useful.

Border Teaching

It is very important that there be collaborative teaching between national Bahá'í communities in border areas, both by travel teaching across the border and in the organization of joint teaching campaigns on both sides of it. Each National Spiritual Assembly should study this possibility and,

if it finds such projects profitable, should seek the collaboration of its sister National Assemblies and request the advice and assistance of the Continental Board of Counselors.

Teaching Conferences

These conferences, whether national or regional, in addition to providing good opportunities for fanning the enthusiasm of the friends and fostering their unity, have been effectively used by many National Assemblies as working conferences where reports are given of the status of the goals of the Plan and of the urgent needs and priorities; and, where necessary, calls are raised for pioneers, traveling teachers and funds.

Summer and Winter Schools

The Guardian once described the institution of the Summer School in a letter written on his behalf, as “a vital and inseparable part of any teaching campaign.” In April 1972 the House of Justice issued a compilation on the importance of Bahá’í Summer Schools, and it commends this to every National Spiritual Assembly for study. In only a few countries has it been possible or timely to acquire properties to house Summer and Winter Schools; in most they are still held in rented premises, and the House of Justice stresses the importance of holding them at as low a cost as possible in a place that is easily accessible to the friends, so that large numbers of believers and inquirers can attend. It is hoped that this activity will become at least an annual feature of the Bahá’í community life in every land.

The Bahá’í Education of Children

It is important to hold regular Bahá’í children’s classes to give the children a thorough grounding in knowledge of the teachings and history of the Faith, to imbue them with its spirit, to establish loving ties between them and to provide them with that firm foundation in the Faith which will enable them to grow up as staunch and enlightened servants of Bahá’u’lláh. Non-Bahá’í parents will often welcome the opportunity of having their children take part in such classes, and this, in addition to the benefit it confers upon the children, may well be a means of attracting their parents to the Faith.

Tutorial Schools

This is a term, originally adopted in the Bahá’í community of India, to describe the simple type of school, organized and conducted under the auspices of the Bahá’í administrative institutions, wherein one teacher is employed to conduct classes in reading and writing and elementary subjects for the Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í children in a village. In addition to the academic subjects he also conducts Bahá’í classes for the children and, in his spare time, makes a valuable contribution to the teaching and consolidation work in his own and neighboring Bahá’í communities. The school may be held in the open air, in one of the houses of the Bahá’ís, in the local Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds, or in a simple building constructed for the purpose, as conditions allow.

The teacher’s salary as well as the other costs of the school are provided out of fees paid by the parents, supplemented, if necessary and possible, by allocations from the local or national funds.

In the Tablet of the World Bahá’u’lláh states that “Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.” In many countries this duty is fulfilled through the taxes that the government levies for the support of the state educational system, but there are other lands where no such facilities are provided and the Local Spiritual Assemblies may well begin to fulfill this aspect of their duties by encouraging the local friends to contribute to a special education fund which can be used for the support of tutorial schools or to assist the children of indigent believers to obtain schooling.

Publications

Every National Spiritual Assembly should have a well conceived plan for the provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature for the believers and for the teaching work. In translation and publication, priority should be given to the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, for without access to the life-giving waters of the Holy Word, how are the believers to deepen in their understanding of the Teachings and convey them accurately to others?

Recordings

In addition to the publication of Texts and teaching materials for the friends, it would be helpful in areas where the degree of literacy is not high, to find ways to teach the friends Bahá'í songs, poems, stories and brief quotations from the Writings as well as prayers. This can be done through the use of cassette tapes or radio broadcasts.

The goal given to certain national communities to make recordings of the Holy Texts is not intended to imply the large-scale production of cassette tapes but rather the development of locally based programs for the recording on cassette tapes of passages in the indigenous languages. Such tapes can then be carried by traveling teachers to outlying areas, used in the teaching work, or left behind if there are tape-recorders locally available.

Communications

Keeping the friends informed of the news of the Faith is so important that every National Assembly is urged to devote attention to the prompt and regular dissemination of its national newsletter, supplemented, where necessary and feasible, by regional and local news organs. Some National Assemblies have also found that cassette recordings can be useful for communicating with friends in outlying areas, and radio programs can, of course, fulfill a similar purpose.

Correspondence Courses

Such courses have proved their usefulness both for teaching the Faith and deepening the knowledge of the believers, and their production has been given as a goal to some national communities. If any National Assembly assigned this goal is not certain how to proceed, it may consult with the Continental Board of Counselors or write to the Universal House of Justice which will put it in touch with those National Assemblies most likely to be able to help.

Properties

Many properties have already been acquired in the course of previous plans. It is important that these properties be properly maintained in good repair. National Spiritual Assemblies should set aside sums annually in their budgets for the maintenance of national properties so that when a repair becomes necessary the funds will be available without creating a sudden crisis for the national fund. As far as possible, local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and other local properties should be kept up by the local friends themselves.

It is also important to make full use of the properties of the Faith for the purposes for which they were acquired. Well maintained and regularly used properties will not only be a means of fostering Bahá'í community life, but will add to the prestige and dignity of the Faith in the eyes of the non-Bahá'í public.

A number of properties called for in the Five Year Plan, such as district and local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and local endowments, have not yet been acquired, usually as a result of local circumstances beyond the control of the friends. These goals should continue to be diligently pursued so that they will be attained as soon as conditions permit. If there are insuperable difficulties which make such a property unobtainable in the foreseeable future, a full report should be sent to the Universal House of Justice.

For goals requiring the acquisition of additional local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds during the initial phase of the Seven Year Plan, no budget has been provided for assistance from the International Fund.

The Universal House of Justice is eagerly anticipating an upsurge of activity in the years ahead, and assures you all of its fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the rapid progress of all aspects of the new Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat