

The Universal House of Justice

19 August 1982

To the Friends gathered at the Bahá'í International Conference at Lagos

Dearly loved Friends,

With hearts overflowing with love for the people of Africa, so richly endowed with the gifts of the spirit, so abundantly and repeatedly blessed since the dawn of this Revelation, and so gloriously promising in the unfoldment of their hidden potentialities, we welcome the friends gathered at this Conference held in one of the most important capitals of their emergent continent.

As we review the annals of our Faith we see that since the days of the Blessed Beauty and up to the early 1950s, the activities of the friends in Africa had produced the formation of one National Spiritual Assembly with its seat in Cairo, Egypt, the opening of 12 countries to the light of the Faith, and some 50 localities established throughout its vast lands. It was at such a time that the beloved Guardian ushered in the first African Teaching Plan, to be followed during the remaining years of his ministry and in subsequent years after his passing, by a series of challenging and bravely executed plans designed to implant the banner of the Faith throughout the length and breadth of that continent and its neighboring islands. Today, after the lapse of a little over three decades, we stand in awe as we view with admiration one of the most valiant contingents of the Army of Light, guided by its own Board of Counselors, led and administered by 37 National Spiritual Assemblies and 4990 Local Spiritual Assemblies, privileged to serve an eager and radiant community of believers drawn from 1152 African tribes residing in 29,000 localities.

How wonderful that it has been possible to convene this Conference on African soil with such a large number of African friends in attendance, in loving memory of the most distinguished heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, the eldest daughter of the King of Glory, who lived a long life of sacrificial service to the Cause of her Beloved Father. Her meekness, her unassuming nature, the purity of her soul, the sensitivity of her heart, the calmness of her demeanor, her patience and long-suffering in trials, and above all, her unshakable faith, her tenderness and love, and the spirit of self-renunciation which she evinced throughout her blessed life, are outstanding characteristics that we can well emulate, particularly in Africa, where these heavenly qualities play such an important part in attracting the souls and winning the hearts to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

We rejoice in the knowledge that some communities have already initiated in her name teaching and consolidation campaigns of far-reaching magnitude; that many Bahá'í women, inspired by her example, are accepting an ever-greater share of responsibility in running the affairs of the community; and that numerous newsletters are reflecting eulogies of the station she occupied, the sufferings she endured, and the heroism she demonstrated in her love for the glorious Cause of her Lord.

The fortunes of the Seven Year Plan in Africa are in the balance. As we draw near to the midway point in the unfoldment of the processes it has set in motion, we call upon its valiant promoters on the African mainland and its surrounding islands, to take stock of their position, to reappraise their progress, and to concentrate their resources on whatever portions of the goals are as yet unachieved. Chief among its objectives are a widespread recruitment of many more supporters of the Most Great Name, the deepening of the individual believers, for the fulfillment of all goals ultimately depends upon them, and a notable increase in the number of newly formed as well as firmly rooted Local Spiritual Assemblies, to serve as bases for the manifold activities of the community, including the Bahá'í education of children, a greater participation of women and youth in Bahá'í activities, and the formulation of ways and means to enrich the spiritual lives of the "noble" and "purehearted" believers of a "FAST-AWAKENING CONTINENT."

May the participants in this Conference carry to the mass of their devoted fellow believers, whose personal circumstances have made it impossible for them to attend, the spirit of joy and optimism which we hope will be generated at this gathering and the flames of enthusiasm which we pray will be enkindled in their hearts.

May the memory of the Greatest Holy Leaf, who through her life of heroic self-sacrifice has left to us “a legacy that time can never dim,” inspire the friends in every country of the continent to rededicate themselves to the Cause of God, not to allow any opportunity for mentioning the Faith to slip by unutilized, and not to permit one day of their lives to pass without a noble effort to draw nearer to the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty.

Our fervent prayers surround you as you proceed with your deliberations.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]