

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 1984

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The emergence from obscurity, which has been so marked a feature of the Cause of God during the first five years of the Seven Year Plan, has been attended by changes, both external and internal, affecting the Bahá'í world community. Externally, there are signs of a crystallization of a public image of the Cause—largely uninformed, however friendly—while internally growing maturity and confidence are indicated by increased administrative ability, a desire for Bahá'í communities to render service to the larger body of mankind and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the divine Message to modern problems. Both these aspects of change must be taken into consideration as we enter the third and final phase of the Seven Year Plan.

The year just closing has been overshadowed by the continued persecution of the friends in Iran. They have been forced to disband their administrative structure, they have been harassed, dispossessed, dismissed from employment, made homeless and their children are refused education. Some six hundred men, women and children are now in prison, some denied any contact with their friends and relatives, some subjected to torture and all under pressure to recant their faith. Their heroic and exemplary steadfastness has been the mainspring in bringing the Cause out of obscurity, and it is the consolation of their hearts that their suffering results in unprecedented advances in teaching and proclaiming the divine Message to a world so desperately in need of its healing power. For this they embrace the final service of martyrdom. Our obligation is crystal clear. We cannot fail them now. Sacrificial action in teaching and promoting the Cause of God must follow every new instance of publicity arising from their persecution. Let this be our message to them of love and spiritual union.

In the international sphere, the beloved Hands of the Cause, ever growing in our love and admiration, have, whenever their health has permitted, continued to uplift and encourage the friends and to promote the unity and onward march of the army of life. The International Teaching Centre, operating from its world seat, has provided loving and wise leadership and direction to the Boards of Counselors. Its sphere of service has been immensely extended by the assignment of new responsibilities and by raising the number of its Counselor members to seven. The dedicated services of the Counselors in all the continents, ably supported by the Auxiliary Board members, have been invaluable in fostering the spiritual health and integrity of the worldwide community. To develop further this vital organ of the Administrative Order, it has been decided to establish a term of five years' service for those appointed to the Auxiliary Boards, commencing November 26, 1986. The work of the Bahá'í International Community in relationship with the United Nations has brought increasing appreciation of our social attitudes and principles, and in some instances—notably the sessions on human rights—the Bahá'í participation has been spectacular, again resulting from the heroism of the Persian friends. The Geneva office has been consolidated and additional staff engaged to deal with its expanding activities. In spite of severe problems the construction of the Indian and Samoan Houses of Worship has progressed satisfactorily, and the latter will be dedicated and opened to public worship between August 30th and September 3rd 1984, when the Universal House of Justice will be represented by the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Immediately following the International Convention last Riḍván, two new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed—in St. Lucia and Dominica. Two new radio stations will make their inaugural broadcasts this year, namely Radio Bahá'í of Bolivia, at Caracollo, and WLGI, the Bahá'í radio station at the Louis Gregory Institute, in the United States. Bahá'í membership in eleven countries, all in the Third World and nine of them island communities, have reached or surpassed one per cent of the total population.

During the final months of the second phase of the Seven Year Plan a generous response has been made by believers and institutions alike to an appeal which set out the increasing needs of the International Fund. We are confident that sustained and regular contributions during the final phase of the Plan will enable its aims and objectives to be fully accomplished.

The entrance of the Cause onto the world scene is apparent from a number of public statements in which we have been characterized as “model citizens,” “gentle,” “law-abiding,” “not guilty of any political offense or crime”— all excellent but utterly inadequate insofar as the reality of the Faith and its aims and purposes are concerned. Nevertheless people are willing to hear about the Faith, and the opportunity must be seized. Persistently greater and greater efforts must be made to acquaint the leaders of the world, in all departments of life, with the true nature of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation as the sole hope for the pacification and unification of the world. Simultaneous with such a program must be unabated, vigorous pursuit of the teaching work, so that we may be seen to be a growing community, while universal observance by the friends of the Bahá’í laws of personal living will assert the fullness of, and arouse a desire to share in, the Bahá’í way of life. By all these means the public image of the Faith will become, gradually but constantly, nearer to its true character.

The upsurge of zeal throughout the Bahá’í world for exploration of the new dimension of social and economic development is both heartwarming and uplifting to all our hopes. This energy within the community, carefully and wisely directed, will undoubtedly bring about a new era of consolidation and expansion, which in turn will attract further widespread attention, so that both aspects of change in the Bahá’í world community will be interactive and mutually propelling.

A prime element in the careful and wise direction needed is the achievement of victory in the Seven Year Plan, paying great attention to the development and strengthening of Local Assemblies. Great efforts must be made to encourage them to discharge their primary duties of meeting regularly, holding the Nineteen Day Feasts and observing Holy Days, organizing children’s classes, encouraging the practice of family prayers, undertaking extension teaching projects, administering the Bahá’í Fund and constantly encouraging and leading their communities in all Bahá’í activities. The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practicing this Bahá’í principle. Bahá’í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities. Bahá’í youth, now rendering exemplary and devoted service in the forefront of the army of life, must be encouraged, even while equipping themselves for future service, to devise and execute their own teaching plans among their contemporaries.

Now, as we enter the final, two year phase of the Seven Year Plan, we rejoice in the addition of nine new National Spiritual Assemblies; three in Africa, three in the Americas, two in Asia, one in Europe, bringing the total number to 143. Five more are to be established in Riḍván 1985. They are Ciskei, Mali and Mozambique in Africa and the Cook Islands and the West Caroline Islands in Australasia. Thus the Plan will end with a minimum of 148 National Spiritual Assemblies. By that time plans must be approved for the completion of the Arc around the Monument Gardens on Mount Carmel, including the siting and designs of the three remaining buildings to be constructed around that Arc.

There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá’í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.

Accompanying this Riḍván message are a call for 298 pioneers to settle in 79 national communities, and specific messages addressed to each of the present 143 national communities. They are the fruit of intensive study and consultation by the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre, and set out the goals to be won and the objectives to be pursued by each national community so that Riḍván 1986 may witness the completion in glorious victory of this highly significant Plan. It will have run its course through a period of unprecedented world confusion, bearing witness to the vitality, the irresistible advance and socially creative power of the Cause of God, standing out in sharp contrast to the accelerating decline in the fortunes of the generality of mankind.

Beloved Friends, the bounties and protection with which the Blessed Beauty is nurturing and sheltering the infant organism of His new world order through this violent period of transition and trial, give ample assurance of victories to come if we but follow the path of His guidance. He rewards our humble efforts with effusions of grace which bring not only advancement to the Cause but assurance and happiness to our hearts, so that we may indeed look upon our neighbors with bright and shining faces, confident that from our services now will eventuate that blissful future which our descendants will inherit, glorifying Bahá'u'lláh, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of Mankind.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]