

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

31 January 1985

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 13 December 1984 inquiring about the Lesser Peace and the Supreme Tribunal referred to in the writings of the Faith. We are asked to convey the following comments.

Bahá'u'lláh's principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá'ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá'í community. This does not mean, however, that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God's good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his "The Goal of a New World Order." In connection with the steps that will lead to this latter stage, the Universal House of Justice will certainly determine what has to be done, in accordance with the guidance in the Writings, such as the passage you quoted from *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 89. In the meantime, the Bahá'ís will undoubtedly continue to do all in their power to promote the establishment of peace.

The Universal House of Justice is greatly pleased with the initiative you have taken with others to start an organization through which youth can contribute their considerable energies and creative abilities towards fostering world peace. It fully appreciates the wisdom of your approach in not affiliating your organization directly with the Faith and finds your leaflet describing the aims of Youth for World Peace most impressive. Since 1986 has been designated the International Year of Peace by the United Nations, your efforts are timely and will blend with the activities to be undertaken by the Bahá'í community during that year and beyond.

In your worthy endeavors to pursue your goal to create a peace movement of youth around the world which would draw non-Bahá'í youth within the influence of Bahá'í concepts, you should seek the advice of your National Spiritual Assembly, which is in a position to give you necessary advice.

Regarding your question about the Supreme Tribunal, enclosed are a few extracts from statements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi on this subject; also included is a statement on the Lesser Peace.

We are asked by the House of Justice to assure you of its ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your noble efforts may contribute significantly to the upraising of the banner of peace in the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

So long as these prejudices survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars.

To remedy this condition there must be universal peace. To bring this about, a Supreme Tribunal must be established, representative of all governments and peoples; questions both national and international must be referred thereto, and all must carry out the decrees of this Tribunal. Should any government or people disobey, let the whole world arise against that government or people.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, [Rev. ed.] [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982], p. 249)

For example, the question of universal peace, about which Bahá'u'lláh says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. But the Supreme Tribunal which Bahá'u'lláh has described will fulfill this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And His plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation—that is to say parliaments—should elect two or three persons who are the choicest of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. The Supreme Tribunal will be composed of these people and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is! But by a limited and restricted League the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should. This is the truth about the situation, which has been stated....

(Tablet to the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 306–7)

A Supreme Tribunal shall be established by the peoples and Governments of every nation, composed of members elected from each country and Government. The members of this Great Council shall assemble in unity. All disputes of an international character shall be submitted to this Court, its work being to arrange by arbitration everything which otherwise would be a cause of war. The mission of this Tribunal would be to prevent war.

(*Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*, 11th ed.
[London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979], p. 155)

From letters written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believers

The Supreme Tribunal

The Universal Court of Arbitration and the International Tribunal are the same. When the Bahá'í State will be established they will be merged in the Universal House of Justice.
(17 June 1933)

As regards the International Executive referred to by the Guardian in his “Goal of a New World Order,” it should be noted that this statement refers by no means to the Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, but simply to that world government which will herald the advent and lead to the final establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The formation of this International Executive, which corresponds to the executive head or board in present-day national governments, is but a step leading to the Bahá'í world government of the future, and hence should not be identified with either the institution of the Guardianship or that of the International House of Justice.

(17 March 1934)
(refers to pp. 40–41 of *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*)

1 and 2 The Supreme Tribunal is an aspect of a World Super-state; the exact nature of its relationship to that State we cannot at present foresee.

(19 November 1945)

The above statement was in reply to the following questions:

1. Is the Supreme Tribunal the world court or world tribunal referred to in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” p. 43, and “Goal of a New World Order,” p. 20? [See *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 203 and 41.] Is it part of the world Super-State just as our Supreme Court is part of the federal government at Washington?
2. Will the Supreme Tribunal (a world court) exist apart from the world government?

The Lesser Peace

With reference to the question you have asked concerning the time and means through which the Lesser and Most Great Peace, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, will be established, following the coming World War: Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í superstate—your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization.”

(14 March 1939)