THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

21 July 1985

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Election of Delegates to National Conventions

As you are aware, some national communities elect their delegates to the National Convention on the basis of areas which have Local Spiritual Assemblies, while in other, larger, national communities delegates are elected on the basis of electoral units in which all adult believers have the vote.

In view of the growth of the Faith and the developing life of the Bahá'í communities, the Universal House of Justice has decided that, notwithstanding that in some countries the number of believers and of Local Spiritual Assemblies is still small, the time has come for delegates to National Conventions everywhere to be elected on the basis of electoral units, but with the option of introducing certain differences from the procedures followed to date. These differences are explained below and are designed to make the system adaptable to the variations in the make-up of the many Bahá'í communities and in the geography of the lands in which they are situated.

The House of Justice has decided that the number of delegates to each National Convention will remain unchanged for the present. However, if a National Assembly finds that under the new system a change would be advisable, it should feel free to write to the World Center stating the reasons for its view.

When establishing the electoral unit basis for the election of delegates, a National Spiritual Assembly should divide the territory under its jurisdiction into electoral units, based on the number of adult Bahá'ís in each area, in such a way that each unit will be responsible for electing preferably one delegate only.

In addition to the voting, the opportunity for consultation with the delegates is important. Hitherto this has been achieved by calling a convention in each unit to which all the believers in that electoral unit are invited. The voting for delegates has then taken place at the unit conventions with provision for voting by mail for those who do not attend. In some areas these meetings have been very fruitful and have helped to foster collaboration among the believers in the unit. However, in other areas, no doubt for a number of reasons, attendance at unit conventions has been very low, as has been the voting by mail, and this has meant that the delegates have been elected by a relatively small proportion of the electorate. National Assemblies are free to call unit conventions if they find they are successful, but if they find problems of attendance they may follow the alternative method described below.

Where holding unit conventions has proved ineffective, or does not seem to be a viable procedure, a National Assembly may divide each electoral unit into subunits of a convenient size. A meeting could then be held in each subunit to which all the adult believers residing therein would be invited. This should result in the participation of a large number of the believers. It is important to remember, however, that the delegate to be elected represents the *entire unit* and therefore, although the voting may be carried out in subunits, each voter has all the adult believers resident in the *entire unit* to choose from in voting for the delegate.

In some countries, it may even be too difficult to expect the believers throughout a subunit to gather together at a certain time, and so it would not be practical to hold subunit meetings. In such

places a central point in each subunit could be chosen for the establishment of a polling station to which the friends would come to leave their ballots on the voting day as and when they can do so.

When one considers that there are now national Bahá'í communities varying in size from India to a single small island, some established in highly industrialized thickly populated countries, some in widely scattered archipelagoes, others covering equatorial jungles and still others embracing icebound arctic wastes, one can appreciate that a great deal of discretion must be accorded to each National Spiritual Assembly to establish the most effective means for the election of the delegates to its National Convention within the general principles outlined above.

Each National Spiritual Assembly should study and master the broad outlines of this system. All matters of detail should be decided by the National Assembly which should ensure that the friends are fully informed and thoroughly understand what they are expected to do. The help and advice of the Counselors and their Auxiliary Board members and assistants could be sought in working out these details and in educating the friends. It may also be desirable for the National Assembly to appoint a special national committee to organize the elections and to oversee them through unit or subunit committees or representatives. Such matters of detail could include the following:

— The number of delegates to be allocated to each unit. Although one for each unit is preferable, this may not be practicable in certain instances, such as in a unit which contains one or more very large local communities. In such cases it may be necessary to make the unit large enough to be the electoral base for two or possibly three delegates.

— The number and size of subunits. These could be as many as there are Local Spiritual Assemblies in a unit, the boundaries being so delineated as to include the surrounding isolated believers and Bahá'í groups. It may even be necessary in some remote areas to have subunits in which there are no Local Spiritual Assemblies.

— The body to be responsible for organizing a unit convention or subunit meeting or for establishing and supervising a polling station. This could be a centrally located, firmly established Local Spiritual Assembly or a committee.

— The day or days on which the elections should take place. Elections could be carried out in different subunits on different days, extended over a reasonable period of time, if this is felt to be desirable.

— The manner in which ballots are to be cast, collected, counted, and consolidated with other ballots from the same unit.

— Procedures to be followed in consultation, if the procedure chosen allows for consultation.

— A method for monitoring the balloting to ensure that proper Bahá'í procedures are followed, that the ballots are safeguarded, and that a Bahá'í voter cannot cast more than one ballot.

— The procedure for holding a second ballot should there be a tie vote for the delegate.

— The means for announcing to the friends in all units the names of their elected delegates.

It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the implementation of these instructions this year and thereafter will promote Bahá'í solidarity, broaden the basis of representation at the National Conventions and that thereby the work of the Faith in each country will be characterized by greater efficiency and enhanced harmony.

As this further step in the onward march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is taken, you are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Holy Shrines that you will be granted vision and wisdom to carry out your task and be enabled to extend the range of your dedicated services to His Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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