

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

5 August 1985

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its letter of 23 January 1985 concerning the International Year of Peace, the Universal House of Justice urged Bahá'í communities to reach out to the non-Bahá'í public by finding ways of discussing the important issues of peace with others. One way to make such discussions relevant and effective is for the friends to know and acknowledge and pay just tribute to persons whose lives were dedicated to peaceful means of bettering social conditions.

One such person was the black American Martin Luther King, Jr., whose promotion of nonviolent means of achieving racial equality in the United States cost him his life. The positive effects of his heroic efforts brought encouragement to downtrodden peoples throughout the world and earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Four years later he was assassinated. His aspirations for a society in which the races can live in harmony are perhaps best expressed in the famous speech he delivered at a gathering of some 250,000 people in the capital of the United States in 1963. A copy is enclosed.

The House of Justice has asked us to call your attention to Dr. King for these reasons. His widow, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, a non-Bahá'í, has written to the House of Justice that a national public holiday has been officially designated in the United States in honor of Dr. King. She intends to make an appeal that on 20 January 1986, the first observance of this holiday, "nations and liberation movements all over the world cease all violent actions, seek amnesty and reconciliation both within and outside of their national boundaries, and encourage all of their citizens to recommit themselves to work for international peace, universal justice and the elimination of hunger and poverty in the world." The House of Justice feels that Mrs. King has a noble intention to which the friends can lend their moral and spiritual support. Since the date on which action is desired falls within the International Year of Peace, Spiritual Assemblies may consider holding peace conferences on 20 January, or close to that date, and naturally include in the presentations at these conferences references to the life and work of Dr. King. An alternative might be to devote the Bahá'í programs on World Religion Day, 19 January, to peace and on these occasions pay tribute to Dr. King.

The thought of the House of Justice in suggesting such action is not to promote the holiday for Dr. King, and it does not expect Bahá'í communities everywhere to commemorate his life annually; rather, it wishes to indicate to the friends a legitimate occasion, as illustrated by Mrs. King's plan, when the Bahá'í peace activities can be associated with the worthy activities of others.

We are to assure you of the continuing prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that your energetic efforts to further the cause of peace throughout the earth may be richly confirmed by the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat