

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

14 January 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Mariana Islands

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of 25 November 1987 to the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community concerning the issues of "indigenous rights" and "self-determination" was passed to the Universal House of Justice, which has instructed us to convey the following reply.

With the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and the emphasis that His Revelation gives to the oneness of mankind, it is inevitable that peoples in all parts of the world who once seemed dormant or who have suffered discrimination would rise to assert their place in society. As with so many fundamental social issues, those concerning "indigenous rights" and "self-determination" find, for Bahá'ís, their proper expression and resolution within the context of the principle of the oneness of mankind. However, as is often the case, such issues are expressed in political forms which are unacceptable to Bahá'ís, who conscientiously avoid partisanship, subversion, and the corrupt attitudes and involvements associated with politics. At the same time, it is recognized that important issues of society fall within the province of government and perforce engage political processes currently in practice. Increasingly, as the Faith emerges from obscurity the Bahá'í community will find itself compelled to assist in finding solutions to the social problems afflicting humanity; it will have to be wise in its actions to avoid the pitfalls of politics.

Generally, the wisest course for the Bahá'í community in controversial situations is to remain uninvolved; however, at times when primary Bahá'í principles are at the heart of an issue, the decision of the National Assembly concerned should not necessarily be to observe silence but, rather, to take action which rises above the partisan political manifestations of the controversy. The Assembly may, for instance, present its own statement to the authorities, setting forth its views on essential issues on the basis of principle, letting the circumstances determine how the principle is best to be applied. If you feel that such action would be appropriate in the situation you face with respect to the issues raised in your letter, you may wish to draft such a statement, but before releasing it, kindly check with the World Center.

Concerning indigenous rights, it stands to reason that indigenous people are entitled to all the human rights accorded other peoples. For example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should be eliminated. At the same time, it would be unseemly for the demands for their rights to make, on the basis of their indigenesness, a special claim to exclusive rights and privileges which exceed the necessity to redress injustices. The Bahá'í attitude on such questions should be guided by Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." Thus it should be borne in mind that while upholding indigenous rights may well deserve the support of the Bahá'ís, often the viewpoints of those claiming such rights are so circumscribed and narrow that Bahá'ís find it difficult to wholeheartedly subscribe to them.

The United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community will send you the statements requested in your letter.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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