

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

22 June 1989

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice wrote to you on 21 September 1988 expressing its concern about the conditions existing within your Assembly and asking for views and recommendations to be sent to it by members of the National Spiritual Assembly individually. A number of responses have been received, along with additional information requested by the House of Justice from other sources. We have been directed to convey to you the following.

One of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which stands in striking contrast to the administrative systems associated with past Dispensations, is the responsibility it places upon the individual believer to participate in its activities. In contrast to the members of congregations of many other religions whose role is principally that of being the recipients of instruction and advice from their ecclesiastical leaders, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are called upon, in their relationships within the community, to engage in consultation, to follow closely the affairs of the Faith in their region, to offer their views and recommendations on all matters which pertain to the interests of the Faith and its community, and to elect the Spiritual Assemblies and cooperate wholeheartedly with them. This active involvement by every Bahá'í in the life of the community provides it with access to each individual's insight and wisdom and is a source of great strength to the organic unit.

Membership on an Assembly imposes upon the believer the spiritual responsibility to become an active participant in its work, to be fully informed of its endeavors, and to ensure that its functioning is in accord with Bahá'í principles. Every Assembly member should recognize that he has a duty to ensure that his voice is heard and that appropriate consideration is given to his views. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that consultation succeeds in avoiding "ill-feeling or discord" when "every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument," with the further affirmation by the Guardian that "it is not only the right but the sacred obligation of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid of displeasing or alienating any of his fellow members," and "The Assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express wholehearted and unqualified obedience to the well considered judgment and directions of the majority of their fellow members."

No member of an Assembly should feel inhibited from participating in the consultation because of what he may believe to be deficiencies in his education, experience or knowledge of the Faith. Rather he should rely with unshakeable faith on the divine confirmations which will bestow wisdom and guidance upon the sincere believer who approaches his assigned functions in a spirit of consecration and humility, beseeching the aid of the Omniscient Lord. He should also be guided by the observation of the Guardian: "Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given assembly."

If an Assembly member feels that there are barriers affecting the consultation of the body, he should frankly and courageously raise his concerns; these barriers could include, for example, the consultation moving at a speed which confuses him, language being used which he cannot understand, behavioral characteristics which unwittingly express condescension leading to the humiliation of others, or a feeling that one is being ignored. Such barriers may well arise as the

Faith continues its inexorable progress in creating dynamic consultative bodies which bring together, in a spirit of unity and equality, the historically divided elements of humanity, thus laying the foundation for a new and ever advancing civilization.

It is the responsibility of all members of an Assembly to ensure that its officers are elected properly, function correctly and discharge their duties in accordance with the decisions of the Assembly. If a member feels, for example, that the meetings are not chaired effectively, that the minutes are not an accurate report of the decisions made at the meeting, or that the correspondence of the secretary or the financial transactions carried out by the treasurer do not conform to the instructions of the Assembly, he should bring this matter up at the Assembly meeting, taking care to ensure that this is done with appropriate moderation, courtesy and balance.

The Universal House of Justice trusts that these clarifications will assist your Assembly to improve the quality of your consultation and the effectiveness of your functioning. It requests you to ensure that copies of this letter are provided to each member of the Assembly, and that translations are provided if any individual members of the Assembly feel that this would facilitate their understanding of it. When all members have had an opportunity to study the letter, you should arrange a special session of the Assembly for consultation on its contents. You may also wish to seek the advice of the Counselors on measures to be taken to carry out more fully its provisions.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat