

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

24 June 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Following fast upon the inspiring events of the seventh International Bahá'í Convention and the subsequent Counselors' Conference, the opening weeks of the Three Year Plan have been marked with yet another highly significant event. On the morning of Saturday 5 June, the Hands of the Cause of God 'Alí Akbar Furútan and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, with all nine Counselor members of the International Teaching Centre, joined the members of the Universal House of Justice in Bahjí and proceeded to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh for prayer as the initial act of the newly appointed Teaching Center. All then held a first meeting in the room used by Shoghi Effendi in the Mansion of Bahjí, recalling the many historic associations of that blessed spot.

Joint consultations continued on the afternoon of that same day in the Council Chamber of the Universal House of Justice, exploring the tasks now facing the International Teaching Centre as the world advances through the climacteric years at the close of the twentieth century.

During the five years since May 1988, when far-reaching decisions were made on the functioning of the International Teaching Centre and, for the first time, the number of its Counselor members was raised to nine, that institution has abundantly demonstrated its capacity and eagerness to assume the wide range of responsibilities conferred upon it.

The clarification of various approaches to the teaching work which the Teaching Center has issued, its indication of potentially fruitful methods and fields of endeavor, and the collaboration of the Counselors with the National Spiritual Assemblies in the formulation of their goals for the Three Year Plan have contributed immeasurably to the deepening of the understanding of the individual believers; the teaching, enrollment and inspiring of children and youth; the consolidation of growing communities; the strengthening of their institutions; and unflagging pursuit of the expansion of the Cause.

The Teaching Center's former duties relating to the formulation of plans for our approval have undergone a change as a result of the devolution of planning upon National Spiritual Assemblies which was a mark of the opening of the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age. We have been most favorably impressed by the guidance it has given to the Continental Counselors to promote consultation at the local and national levels, among institutions and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth in the Bahá'í community, and we look forward to the perpetuation and expansion of this collaboration.

The responsibility of the Continental Boards of Counselors to protect the Faith, under the guidance of the International Teaching Centre, will undoubtedly gain greater importance in the years ahead. They will encourage and assist the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, not only to deal with questions on the Faith raised by interested non-Bahá'ís, but also to counter attacks launched by external opponents.

Study of the Faith itself is a vital element in the soundness of the growth of Bahá'í communities, their consolidation and their protection. This should include systematic study of the Writings of the Faith, its history, its relationship to various systems of thought, and the application of its Teachings to the spiritual and material life of society. The International Teaching Centre will contribute significantly to the advancement of such study.

In the production and dissemination of Bahá'í literature, which is fundamental to both the expansion and consolidation of the Cause, the support given by the Counselors to National

Assemblies through the Literature Subvention Fund and especially the Teaching Center's promotion of the core literature concept have resulted in an admirable surge forward, and we are confident that this effort will be augmented in the years ahead.

The flow of pioneers and traveling teachers has been notably increased through the development of the Continental Pioneer Committees under the aegis of the International Teaching Centre, as well as by the actions of the Continental Counselors and National Assemblies. It has become apparent that, with the growth of the Bahá'í world and the increased mobility of the friends, new methods are required for advising and routing pioneers. The pioneering call for the Three Year Plan therefore assumes a character different from that to which the friends have been accustomed and will, we confidently expect, permit a far more fruitful use of the energies and devotion of the friends.

All the above matters were among the subjects of consultation between the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre at their meetings on 5 June, and during a subsequent meeting towards the close of the intensive consultations carried on by the Teaching Center itself. The five members who are still resident abroad are now preparing to move to the Holy Land.

It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these developments will impart a yet greater impetus to the activities of the individual believers and their institutions throughout the world and accelerate the work already so eagerly launched for the achievement of the Three Year Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]