THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 152

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Season of seasons, we greet you with profound pleasure at the increased activity throughout the Bahá'í community during the year just passed and with ardent expectations as to what must and can be accomplished during the last third of the Three Year Plan. We feel both concern and hope in the face of the despair besetting leaders of nations and peoples in their search for solutions to pressing social problems. Indeed, such desperation is tantamount to a worldwide cry for the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, truly a challenge and a promise no conscientious Bahá'í institution or individual can ignore.

No occasion has more sharply conveyed this melancholy outlook than the recent World Summit for Social Development, the latest in a series of international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations. But however little may be the immediate influence of such events on the policies of governments, however much the vast majority of the world's population may disregard or be unaware of them, their successive occurrence indicates to any Bahá'í observer a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfillment of the will of Bahá'u'lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and decide on the outstanding issues confronting an increasingly global society.

Propitiously on that momentous occasion in Copenhagen, an impressive Bahá'í effort, involving some 250 friends from more than 40 countries, was mounted to acquaint the participants in the Summit and the related NGO Forum with the remedies prescribed by the Divine Physician. This effort was extended beyond the Summit and is even now continuing in many places throughout the world. We applaud with heartfelt gratitude the Bahá'í institutions, agencies and individuals who produced this spate of action before, during and after the Summit, for surely it evinced both the further advance of our world community in influencing the processes towards the Lesser Peace and a multiplication of opportunities for a wider diffusion of the reformative Message of Bahá'u'lláh. As such world events take place with greater frequency and the Bahá'í community pursues its goals with increased intensity, we can see more clearly the drawing closer together of the parallel processes about which Shoghi Effendi wrote several decades ago: the one leading to the political union of nations, the other to the ultimate union of hearts in one common faith.

We make these observations against an encouraging background of development in the Bahá'í community during the second year of the Three Year Plan. Even more thrilling than the leap in external affairs activities at local and national levels are the evidences of a qualitative change in the response of believers everywhere to the call to teach. A deeper understanding of this inescapable, individual duty is implied by the rise in teaching activity, a heartening situation resulting from several stimulating factors which all together augur well for the long-awaited influx of troops of new believers. Among these factors are the attention being given to the compilation on entry by troops as it appears in an increasing number of languages, the influences of the movement of International and Continental Counselors throughout the globe, the evolution in the functioning of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, the effects of the emphasis being placed on the education of children, and the vigor of the youth in initiating teaching projects and engaging in a range of other Bahá'í activities.

Conducive to this positive picture is the gathering strength of Spiritual Assemblies, which are called upon to cope with manifold challenges while endeavoring primarily to focus on the demands of the teaching work. We are especially mindful of the burdens borne by National

Spiritual Assemblies as the communities within their jurisdictions grow more diverse in their composition and more complex in their demands upon the guidance and assistance of these institutions.

The combined impression of the various stages of development at which the community has arrived suggests that strong effort is being devoted to the triple theme of the Plan, which calls for enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of local and national Bahá'í institutions. But as there is yet much to be done along these lines, a more striking response is required of individuals and institutions, if our community is to combat the ravages of a rampant moral decadence, to raise up a massive army of consecrated souls to meet the demands of teaching and of administering the affairs of the Faith, and to render our institutions fit for the tasks that a burst in the size of the community will surely impose upon them.

Fundamental to any effective response to the immediate challenges facing the community are these requisites which are especially addressed to the individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly: On the one hand is the initiative that it is the duty and privilege of the individual to take in teaching the Cause and in obtaining a deeper understanding of the purpose and requirements of the Faith. Parallel with the exercise of such initiative is the necessity of the individual's participation in collective endeavors, such as community functions and projects. On the other hand is the role of the Local Spiritual Assembly to welcome, encourage and accommodate the initiatives of individual believers to the maximum extent possible; and there is, too, the responsibility of the Assembly to devise or promote plans that will employ the talents and abilities of the individual members of its community, and that will involve individuals in collective action, such as teaching and development projects, institutes, and other group activities. The effects of conscientious attempts at realizing these inseparable requisites will be to expand and consolidate the community and to foster a climate of unified action.

During the last year, there was a sharp increase in the visits to the World Center of high-ranking government officials, other dignitaries and media representatives, demonstrating the growing significance of the spiritual and administrative center of the Faith in the eyes of the world. This appeared to underscore a trend towards a greater familiarity of the governments of the nations with the evolving center of a World Faith. Viewing this trend from the Mountain of God, the site of the current construction projects, and considering it in conjunction with the developments taking place in local and national Bahá'í communities, we can appreciate more adequately the unfolding reality of the vision projected by Shoghi Effendi when he explained the implications of the raising up of buildings that will constitute the world administrative seat of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. "This vast and irresistible process," he said, "will synchronize with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions." It is a vision which, given the state of the world, compels the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects as scheduled.

These projects are advancing with remarkable speed, astonishing pilgrims, tourists and local residents by their magnitude and emerging magnificence. The construction work is occurring on all structures at once. Work on seven of the Terraces below and five above the Shrine of the Báb is in full force. More construction contracts were signed during this year than in any previous one, including the contract recently awarded to an Italian firm for the supply of the marble for the buildings on the Arc. Clearly, the work has gathered a momentum that can abide no delay. Hence, a matching momentum in the flow of contributions is imperative, if the remaining forty million dollars towards fulfillment of the Three Year Plan goal of seventy-four million dollars is to be provided by Riḍván 1996.

The new year begins auspiciously with the formation this Riḍván of five National Spiritual Assemblies. Our representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Armenia and Georgia; the Hand of the Cause ʻAlí-

Muḥammad Varqá, Belarus and Sicily; Counselor Hushang Ahdieh, Eritrea. Moreover, during this period the communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa and Transkei will merge under the jurisdiction of one National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa, so as to reflect the recent political reunion of that region. As a result of the foregoing, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world will rise from 172 to 174.

Beloved coworkers: Beyond the need to win our goals, humanity's current plight summons us to redoubled action. The cloud of despair hanging over the fortunes of a deranged world is the very harbinger of the spring rain that can quench the spiritual and material thirst of every people. It has only to be seeded through constant and confident acts of teaching. The performance of such acts, though dependent for reinforcement on the functions of Bahá'í institutions, rests primarily and ultimately with Bahá'í individuals.

Let no excessive self-criticism or any feelings of inadequacy, inability or inexperience hinder you or cause you to be afraid. Bury your fears in the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh. Has He not asserted that upon anyone who mentions His Name will descend the "hosts of Divine inspiration" and that on such a one will also descend the "Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light"? Step forth, then, into the arena where all His loved ones are equally summoned, equally challenged and abundantly blessed. For to teach, Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms, is to do the "most meritorious of all deeds." And at this extraordinary moment in the history of the planet, nothing whatever is of more critical importance than inviting people of every sort and every gift to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts.

As we send you this message, clearly before us is a vision of untold victories waiting to be seized. We are certain you can realize a myriad of these in the remaining time of the Three Year Plan. Just such an accomplishment must earnestly be striven for, so as to set the stage for the next global enterprise to be launched at Riḍván 1996. There shall be mobilized then a world-embracing campaign to ensure a befitting crescendo to the achievements of a century regarded by no less than 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself as a period that will have "left traces which shall last forever."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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