

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam

Dearly loved Friends,

Some four decades ago, in a message to the first Regional Convention of the Bahá'ís of Southeast Asia, the Guardian wrote of the “far-reaching influence” that area would exercise on the “future destinies of the world Bahá'í community.” He referred to the area's “heterogeneous character” and “geographical position,” underscored “the spiritual receptivity of many of its inhabitants,” and drew attention to “the role they are destined to play in the future shaping of the affairs of mankind.” The remarkable progress of the Faith in Southeast Asia since that time, in a period of social and political upheaval, is but a prelude to the fulfillment of the Guardian's promise. This, taken together with the recent accomplishments of the believers in the neighboring territories as far north as Mongolia, gives rise to a brilliant vision of future triumphs in the entirety of that vast region.

You now embark on the next stage of your endeavors, a Four Year Plan whose aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. Among your peoples, the majority of whom have been influenced by noble and high-minded teachings of Buddhism, are many who possess a profound sense of spirituality, which is reflected in the practices of their daily lives and in the quality of their relationships with one another, with nature, and with their social institutions. They have a keen understanding of the need for coherence between the material and the spiritual, and are disturbed by the effects of gross materialism on their societies in recent years. Your region represents a vast reservoir of potential promoters of the Cause waiting to be tapped. The number and quality of the active supporters of the Faith with which it is already blessed bespeak the richness of that reservoir.

Systematic training programs constitute the most potent instrument at your disposal for realizing the potential of that highly promising region to contribute significantly to the human resources of the Faith. To this end, the establishment and strengthening of institutes will undoubtedly be a central component of the plans of all your countries. Your participation in institute programs, through which you will deepen your knowledge of the Faith, cultivate your inner spiritual lives and develop abilities of service, will enable you to intensify your individual and collective exertions in the teaching field and will result in a commensurate acceleration in the expansion of your communities. Varying patterns of growth, of course, will evolve according to the particular conditions in each country.

In Malaysia, large numbers of believers from among the Chinese, Indian and indigenous populations can be mobilized, and their energies directed towards the stimulation of activity at the local level. Many of the local communities are in a position to implement plans and projects under the direction of their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and they should be encouraged and aided in their efforts to do so. The capacity to achieve rapid and simultaneous expansion and consolidation exists in Malaysia, but needs to be fully exercised. Such an undertaking must be complemented by concrete measures to broaden the range of activities in areas such as the advancement of women, the spread of literacy, and the promotion of moral education—areas in which the Malaysian community already has an impressive record. In addition to contributing to the progress of society, such activities will go far in winning the admiration and respect of the enlightened in government circles and, beyond that, in drawing the attention of leaders of thought throughout the region to the Teachings of the Faith.

The Bahá'í community of Myanmar, which traces its roots back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, has in recent years been able to pay increasing attention to the expansion of the Faith. The results have been encouraging indeed. The large body of believers in Myanmar, faithful to the Covenant and with hearts filled with love for Bahá'u'lláh, who stand ready to serve His Faith, can be helped by the institute program now being established there to enter the field of teaching with confidence. The effects such an endeavor will have, in a land so receptive to the Divine Message, are incalculable.

The friends in Thailand may draw courage from the success of their efforts to help reestablish the Bahá'í community of Cambodia and resolve to turn with the same vigor and determination to the tasks of expansion and consolidation in their homeland. There they have proved themselves capable of teaching among many strata of society and of bringing into their ranks people of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Setting aside all hesitation, and with unity of thought and purpose, let them dedicate the coming four years to the unflinching pursuit of a clearly defined course of action traced for them by their institutions.

In Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where possibilities for growth exist in varying degrees, the sorely tried, steadfast and devoted friends need to demonstrate to the authorities and leaders of their countries that Bahá'ís, obedient and loyal to their governments, desire but the prosperity of their nations and the upliftment of their peoples. Through the spiritual enrichment of families in Vietnam, through the program of deepening in small groups now initiated in Laos, and through systematic plans for expansion and consolidation and for social and economic development in Cambodia, where the friends enjoy greater freedom, each of these communities can achieve substantial progress within the parameters defined for them by prevailing social and political conditions.

The manner in which the Bahá'í community of Mongolia, so young and so full of vitality, has taken its affairs in hand is exhilarating. In the span of seven years, the friends have ranged methodically across that vast land and have established the Faith on solid and enduring foundations. At the national level, they are becoming known for their high ideals, particularly as champions of the rights of children. At the same time, their Bahá'í classes, open to children from Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í families alike, are being received with great enthusiasm, presenting them with extensive teaching opportunities. There is a spirit in the Mongolian people which must needs manifest itself in the efflorescence of a numerically strong, vibrant community.

The Bahá'í community of Singapore is energetic and dedicated. Its past experience demonstrates that focused attention on expansion invariably brings good results. What is required at this stage of the community's development is an accelerating increase in the number of individual enrollments. Such an influx of new souls will continually strengthen the community which, although comparatively small, has demonstrated its ability to play an important role in the affairs of the Faith in the region.

Dear Friends, any attempt to present, no matter how briefly, an overview of the potentialities of your region must necessarily take into account the preponderating influence that the Chinese people are to exert on the destiny of humankind. To them, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has referred as "truth-seeking" and "prompted with ideal motives." From among them, He declared, can be raised "such divine personages that each one of them may become the bright candle of the world of humanity." The progress of the Faith in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the labors of the Chinese believers resident in other parts of the region, are early indications of that which is yet to come. We turn our expectant eyes towards the Chinese people, confident in their ability to become illumined with the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and to apply His Teachings, with characteristic diligence, to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. As larger and larger numbers become imbued with heavenly qualities, and as they make sincere exertions for the progress of their people, they shall, God willing, win the trust of fair-minded leaders and be

able to broaden the scope of their endeavors in a land that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has designated “the country of the future.”

We shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh may sustain you and guide you in your noble services to His Cause.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]