

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Western and Central Asia

Dearly loved Friends,

As a turbulent yet luminous century draws to a close, the Bahá'í community is embarking on another campaign in the progressive unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The global enterprises thus far executed by the consecrated adherents of His Cause have systematically spread the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to every corner of the earth and have firmly established the institutions of His Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan, whose primary aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is being launched at a time when the Cause of God has emerged from obscurity, when its contributions to society are being increasingly acknowledged, and when humanity's prolonged and continuous suffering has created an atmosphere of search for spiritual values and has raised the level of receptivity to the Cause.

We call upon our much-loved coworkers in the western and central parts of the Asiatic continent, the home of the oldest and most venerable Bahá'í communities, to rally round their divinely ordained institutions and to arise during these years to demonstrate once again the devotion, valor and determination which have already conferred matchless distinction upon them. You have the honor of serving the Faith in a region above whose horizon the dawn of the Great Day of the Lord appeared, in whose bosom the infant Cause of God was nurtured, on whose soil so much sacred blood was shed, on whose western shores the Qiblih of the people of Bahá is established, within whose embrace the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was raised, and from which hosts of devoted and committed Bahá'ís have, in the past decades, set out to bear the banner of the Faith to every part of the globe.

Our thoughts turn first to the community of Bahá'u'lláh's lovers in the land where His Faith was born. Although they are still denied the freedom to resume direct participation in the series of campaigns by which the Cause is steadily advancing throughout the world, their achievements constitute irrefutable proof of the creative power of the daily sacrifices they are making for the vindication of the Faith. What is becoming apparent, as this new global Plan opens, is that the build-up of spiritual strength within the Iranian Bahá'í community—purified by suffering and steeled by adversity—represents a reservoir of energy that will, in God's good time, bring incalculable benefits to the Cause. "Say: The springs that sustain the life of these birds are not of this world. Their source is far above the reach and ken of human apprehension."

In the lands to the south and west of Iran, Bahá'ís live under restrictions which prevent them from teaching the Cause to their fellow-countrymen. Yet, by the outstanding contributions they have made to the progress of the Faith in other parts of the world, they have proved that their enthusiasm to spread the Divine Message cannot be dampened. It has been particularly heartening to witness the eagerness and rapidity with which, as soon as the barriers to teaching in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus were removed, they rushed to the aid of the small bands of believers who had persevered there for so many decades and helped them to build the vibrant communities now flourishing in these regions today. No doubt they will continue to lend valuable assistance to the communities in Central Asia and the Caucasus during the Four Year Plan.

In these republics, through the combined efforts of native and visiting teachers, extraordinary advances can be expected. A pattern for the rapid growth of the Cause has already been established in the region: locality after locality has been opened to the Faith and, because of the high receptivity of the people, the number of believers in each place has quickly risen, resulting in the election of a Spiritual Assembly to guide the affairs of the nascent community. Integral to this

pattern, almost from the very outset, has been the holding of regular institute courses, which have assisted the friends in becoming strong promoters of the Cause. If the expansion and consolidation activities are vigorously pursued according to this same pattern in the coming years, the growth of the Faith will accelerate, greatly increasing the number of believers and centers.

To effect such accelerated growth, the friends in these countries must become so deepened in their understanding of the Faith as to take up, on their own initiative, the torch of guidance that will enlighten the multitudes. They should not be content with small communities, nor allow the tasks of administering their own community affairs to divert them from the essential purpose of bringing new members into their ranks. Each community, from the earliest phases of its development, should be fired by a vision of the glory of the Cause and imbued with the zeal to achieve rapid and sustained expansion both in the locality itself and in the nearby towns and villages.

In Pakistan, where a well-grounded community traces its roots back some hundred years, the friends must make a mighty effort to increase their numbers significantly among people of every walk of life. The will and determination needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation can be created through a consistent and widespread institute program aimed at exposing growing contingents of believers to the Creative Word, thus enhancing their spiritual capacities to diffuse the light of the Faith and to further the development of its institutions. Such a rapid process of growth requires that more and more women be enabled to move to the forefront of Bahá'í activity, in both the teaching and administrative fields. While rising to the challenge of entry by troops in their homeland, the friends in Pakistan need also to pay special attention to their long-suffering Afghan neighbors, who cry out for the Healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh, the one true balm for their afflictions.

In all your countries, you must continue to give the highest priority to the education of children. Having seen the effects of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on generation after generation, you well understand the value of Bahá'í education and of a proper spiritual upbringing. In those areas where activities are restricted, you are nevertheless able to teach the children of your own communities and help them to grow to become pillars of strength. In other areas, you have the possibility, nay the obligation, to open your classes to children of non-Bahá'í families and to become known as the educators of the coming generations of your peoples.

Dear Friends, the time is short, and weighty responsibilities have been placed on the shoulders of each and every Bahá'í. In His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Blessed Beauty states:

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and will aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.

Be confident that your dedicated services will, like a magnet, attract the promised confirmations and that your hearts will be gladdened as you witness the successive triumphs of the Cause you hold so dear. We shall remember all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá'u'lláh to guide and assist you, as you face the many challenges of these spiritually potent closing years of the century.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]