

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

18 August 1996

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your fax letter of 2 May 1996, and appreciates your clearly heartfelt concern that reports of Assemblies should be presented in ways which are in accordance with Bahá'í standards of propriety and that any suggestion of electioneering be avoided. It has asked us to send you the following reply.

Electioneering is a practice foreign to the spirit of Bahá'í administration. However, it is necessary to distinguish between electioneering and those activities which should be entirely natural and normal in Bahá'í communities. Bahá'ís travel and teach the Faith, they go pioneering, they represent the Faith in relation to non-Bahá'í agencies, they serve in positions of responsibility. There is no reason why such services should be carried on anonymously. Bahá'í voters have to acquire the maturity to estimate the character and true capacities of their fellow-believers, to be able to distinguish between a person who is self-sacrificingly serving the Cause with all due modesty, and one whose activities are carried out with the primary purpose of bringing himself or herself to the attention of the friends.

Bahá'ís, nevertheless, are subject to all the pressures and standards of the prevalent culture of the society in which they live, and can only too easily be unconsciously influenced in their behavior by the accepted norms of that culture. One of our challenging tasks as Bahá'ís, however, is to establish, through our personal conduct and through the pattern of life in our communities and institutions, those cultural standards which Bahá'u'lláh wishes us to uphold. In a description of the characteristics of those who are called upon to serve in Bahá'í administrative institutions, Shoghi Effendi says:

They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection.

(Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 64.)

As such attitudes and standards become, ever more clearly, the norm of Bahá'í society, the friends will have little difficulty in distinguishing among their fellow-believers those who are worthy of their votes.

With this understanding, the inclusion of the names of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly and of the members of its various committees in its Annual Report is natural and has been a normal practice of National Spiritual Assemblies during the lifetime of Shoghi Effendi and ever since. Likewise it is normal, in writing reports in general, to include the names of believers who have rendered particular services, even though it is not possible to mention every person who has contributed to the achievement.

One of the believers wrote to the Guardian asking how the friends could know for whom to vote as delegates from their electoral district. In the reply written on behalf of the Guardian on 25 March 1949, his secretary said: “the friends, through regional newsletters, National News-Letter, conferences and association with each other, can get to know other Bahá’ís in their state, and become familiar enough with their services and qualifications to vote for their delegates intelligently.” It can be seen from this that the Guardian expected the activities of the friends to be reported, and expected the Bahá’ís to be alert to the qualities and services of their fellow-believers.

The House of Justice trusts that these explanations have helped to assuage your concern and assisted you in your evaluation of the activities of the various friends. It was very happy to note your eager response to the call of the Four Year Plan and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your endeavors on behalf of the Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat