

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

24 March 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Côte d'Ivoire

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your faxed letter dated 21 February 1997 in which you raise various questions about the use of music and dance at Bahá'í Centers and we have been asked to respond as follows.

As you may know, in many parts of the world there are certain tribal and traditional dances which are performed in glorification of God, and it is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of movement or dance. However, to avoid that such expressions of prayer become gradually ritualized, or that certain gestures and movements become habitual accompaniments to prayers, it is preferable that they not accompany the reciting of words of the prayers. Through the revealed prayers, we seek communion with God, hence they must be offered with the utmost reverence and dignity. Each individual Bahá'í should be free to pray as he wishes, for there is no set form for prayer except for those few which have special instructions for observance upon their recitation.

In your second question, you ask regarding the performance of drama and cultural dances in Bahá'í Centers. Provided that the underlying themes or stories are noble and that they are performed in a way which does not elicit base feelings, there is no objection to choreographed dances and dramas, which are intended to illustrate Bahá'í principles, being held in a Bahá'í Center. This same principle would apply to traditional dances or dance movements associated with the expression of a culture. As long as care is exercised to ensure that the themes of such dances are in harmony with the high ethical standards of the Cause and the qualities of dignity and grace are upheld, there is no objection to their use.

With regard to what kind of music can be played at events in Bahá'í Centers, there is no particular type of music which Bahá'ís should or should not use. In this respect, a Bahá'í may well be best guided by the words of Bahá'u'lláh in the Most Holy Book, where He makes it clear that music can be both “a means whereby [the soul] may be lifted up unto the realm on high” and “as wings to self and passion,” and warns against allowing music to “cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity.” In the planning of Bahá'í events, it is left to those responsible for the program to determine “the bounds of propriety and dignity” and ensure that the music chosen is befitting the purpose and solemnity of the occasion, in view of what is most suited to the country's culture and customs.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat