

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

4 July 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to the letter to you dated 30 June 1999 concerning English translations of Bahá'í Writings and their publication, we have been asked to convey to you the following related policies concerning the publication and translation of historical documents. For your ease of reference, Appendix II enclosed summarizes the policies concerning the translation of Bahá'í Sacred Writings into English, which were covered in our earlier letter.

The Universal House of Justice has noted two processes developing in recent years: an increase in the number of Bahá'ís who are individually translating portions of the Sacred Writings into English, and a growing number of Bahá'ís who wish to arrange for the publication of historical documents, accompanied by translations into English. Wishing to facilitate this process, while, at the same time, upholding the standard of approved translations and safeguarding the integrity of the Faith, the House of Justice has formulated two policy statements governing these matters (see Appendices II and III enclosed).

The net purpose of the policies is to speed up the review and publication of such items, and to permit a wider use of provisional translations.

To give you some background to these developments, we have been asked to send to you extracts from a letter which was written on 4 May 1999 to an individual believer who enquired about the provision of primary source material to students of the Faith (see Appendix I). As you will see, these passages cover such matters as the various sources of such material, the duties incumbent upon the Universal House of Justice, the limited resources available to carry out the necessary work at this time, the priority of certain steps, and the defense of the Faith against the machinations of its enemies and the naïveté of some of its faithful followers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Appendix I

[See message dated 4 May 1999, to an individual]

Appendix II

POLICIES GOVERNING AUTHORIZED AND PROVISIONAL TRANSLATIONS OF
THE BAHÁ'Í HOLY WRITINGS INTO ENGLISH AND THEIR PUBLICATION

4 July 1999

The principal purpose of these policies is to extend the use of provisional translations to publication in books and pamphlets, provided that they are of adequate quality, without involving the delays which would be required to have them thoroughly reviewed, corrected and polished.

1. Tablets, or extracts therefrom, translated into English for use or publication by the Bahá'í World Centre will continue to be reviewed by an ad hoc translation and review committee at the World Center and designated as authorized translations.

2. Individual believers are free to translate into English any of the Holy Writings for their own use. Such translations may also be issued electronically, and may be published in circulars or journals without review by anyone other than the editors of the publications, but they must, in all cases, be clearly labeled as “provisional translations.”
3. If such translations are to be included in books or pamphlets intended for publication by a Bahá'í publisher, the Trust or private publisher involved should forward the manuscript to the Bahá'í World Centre for clearance, together with copies of the Arabic or Persian texts used in the translation. If the publisher is not a Bahá'í agency, the authors or translators themselves should forward the manuscript and the Arabic or Persian texts to the Bahá'í World Centre for consideration prior to the involvement of any non-Bahá'í publisher. If the translations are found to be of a quality adequate for publication, the manuscript will be returned to the sender with a note to this effect. Such translations should be identified as “provisional translations.” If the translations are found not to be of acceptable quality, they will be returned to the translator for reworking. This procedure does not replace the normal review process for the book as a whole, which remains the responsibility of the National Spiritual Assembly within whose area of jurisdiction the book or pamphlet is to be published.

Appendix III

POLICIES GOVERNING THE PUBLICATION AND TRANSLATION OF BAHÁ'Í HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

4 July 1999

In view of the increasing interest being shown by individual Bahá'ís in the publication of documents describing historical events of the Bahá'í community and, where necessary, their translation into English and their publication in that language, the following policies have been formulated to accelerate and simplify the process of granting the necessary approval.

It should be noted that, in this context, a “historical document” indicates a document written some time ago either in the course of the events or as a memoir recording events. A historical account now being written by a Bahá'í does not come under these policies but would follow the normal pre-publication review process.

1. Historical documents in the sole possession of the Bahá'í World Centre:

The Universal House of Justice envisages the implementation of a planned process of the examination, cataloging and categorization of all historical documents held by the World Center of the Faith, to be followed, or possibly accompanied, by a program for the preparation of such documents for publication, in facsimile, in the form of transcripts, and, where appropriate, accompanied by a translation into English.

2. Historical documents which are in the hands of members of the Bahá'í community:

It is noted that there are many historical documents which have already been published in the original language, as well as an undetermined number of memoirs and other manuscripts which are in the hands of individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í families. Of these the House of Justice has concern only over those documents which relate to the history of the Faith in Iran, the Arab countries, the Holy Land or other sensitive areas. In relation to these it has established the policies listed below. The publication and translation of all other historical documents is adequately covered by the normal process of review.

1. In countries such as those instanced above, serious danger to the Bahá'í communities could be precipitated by the untimely publication (with or without translation) of historical documents relating to events there. Therefore, every proposal to publish or translate a document relating to the history of the Faith in the Middle East must be referred to the Universal House of Justice for its approval.
2. A Bahá'í who has a copy of a historical document and considers publishing it, should, out of courtesy, consult the immediate family of the writer, seeking their agreement to the publication, before proceeding.
3. When the House of Justice has approved the publication, and/or translation, of a historical document, it should be published in full, without deletions, to preserve the integrity of the document as an entity. If it is decided to publish only the most interesting and publishable portions of a document, the publication should be clearly designated as an abridged version of the work in question or as extracts from it.
4. In most, if not all, cases of the publication of a historical document, it will be desirable for an introduction, footnotes and possibly appendices to be added. At the present time, such additions should be kept to a minimum and should not constitute a mass of supplementary material disproportionate to the document itself.
5. It would be inappropriate for the translation of a Tablet to appear for the first time as a footnote or appendix to such a document.
6. The publication of the original of a historical document, with or without a translation, after being approved in principle by the Universal House of Justice, will require a special kind of review. Bearing in mind that the basic purpose of review is to ensure that a publication gives an accurate impression of the Faith, the reviewers will have to give attention to the following points:
 1. The accuracy of the introduction and footnotes and any other material added to the document itself.
 2. The need for additional footnotes to clarify points of which the document itself may give a misleading or inadequate impression.
 3. The advisability of deleting superfluous footnotes or other supplementary material.
 4. The quality of the translation. The reviewing committee cannot be expected to check the accuracy of the translation, but it should give attention to the quality of expression and the meaning it conveys, and raise questions or make suggestions where necessary. If the number of such points would be large, the whole translation should be referred back to the translator for reworking.