

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

24 September 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its Ridván 2000 message, the Universal House of Justice pointed with keen anticipation to the occurrence this year of millennial gatherings concerned with global issues needing urgent solutions, and with how the United Nations is to address them. During the first week of this month, the United Nations Millennium Summit, the last and most significant of three related events, convened in New York with the participation of the largest number of heads of state and of government ever to be assembled. In view of the historic importance of this and the two earlier occasions, and considering the prominent involvement of representatives of the Bahá'í International Community in all three, the House of Justice has directed us to convey the following.

In calling for a gathering of world leaders at the 2000 session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations also suggested the merit of their inviting the views and recommendations of organizations of civil society; this gave birth to the idea of a Millennium Forum. Another thought that won the warm support of the Secretary-General was that a meeting of religious and spiritual leaders devoted to peace would enhance the work of the United Nations.

Thus, the Millennium Forum, the first of these major gatherings, brought together on 22–26 May more than 1,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations from more than 100 countries “to consult about the role of the United Nations in confronting the great global challenges facing humanity in the 21st Century.” They focused their consultations on the following specific topics: 1) peace, security and disarmament; 2) eradication of poverty, including debt cancellation and social development; 3) human rights; 4) sustainable development and environment; 5) facing the challenges of globalization: achieving equity, justice and diversity; and 6) strengthening and democratizing the United Nations and international organizations.

As a result, the participants in the Millennium Forum adopted a declaration, for presentation to world leaders at the subsequent Millennium Summit, in which they set forth their vision and made their recommendations for revitalizing the United Nations. “In our vision,” these representatives of civil society declared, “we are one human family, in all our diversity, living on one common homeland and sharing a just, sustainable and peaceful world, guided by universal principles of democracy, equality, inclusion, voluntarism, non-discrimination and participation by all persons.... It is a world where peace and human security, as envisioned in the principles of the United Nations Charter, replace armaments, violent conflict and wars. It is a world where everyone lives in a clean environment with a fair distribution of the earth's resources. Our vision includes a special role for the dynamism of young people and the experience of the elderly and reaffirms the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights—civil, political, economic, social and cultural.”

The Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which was held on 28–31 August and involved more than 1,000 attendees, constituted the second of these gatherings. The “very specific purpose” of this meeting of religious leaders was, as stated in the introductory statement of the program, “to further the prospects for peace among peoples and nations, and within every individual.” The outcome of this Peace Summit was the adoption and signing of a declaration committing the participants to global peace. Noting that “the United Nations and the religions of the world have a common concern for human dignity, justice and peace,” accepting that “men and women are equal partners in all aspects of life and children are the hope of the

future,” and acknowledging that “religions have contributed to the peace of the world but have also been used to create division and fuel hostilities,” the declaration resolved to “collaborate with the United Nations and all men and women of goodwill locally, regionally and globally in the pursuit of peace in all its dimensions.”

As you were previously informed in our letter of 15 August 2000, the Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community, Mr. Albert Lincoln, represented the Faith on this occasion. He was listed among the “Pre-eminent World Religious and Spiritual Leaders” in attendance and was afforded the opportunity both to offer a Bahá’í prayer during the opening ceremony and to speak during the third plenary session held in the General Assembly Hall on the second day of the event. His oral presentation was an abridged version of his written statement, the full text of which was distributed to the participants, as shown in the enclosure.

The Millennium Summit, the third and culminating event, was held in response to a resolution of the General Assembly that expressed the conviction that “the year 2000 constitutes a unique and symbolically compelling moment to articulate and affirm an animating vision of the United Nations in the new era.” On the last day, the leaders of more than 150 nations unanimously adopted a declaration that began by asserting: “We, Heads of State and Government, have gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 6 to 8 September 2000, at the dawn of a new Millennium, to reaffirm our faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.”

Highlighting certain “fundamental values”—freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility—the leaders resolved to work towards such objectives as: peace, security and disarmament; development and the eradication of poverty; protecting our common environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations. They made a firm commitment to world peace and world order, concluding their declaration on this resounding note: “We solemnly reaffirm, on this historic occasion, that the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development. We therefore pledge our unstinting support for these common objectives, and our determination to achieve them.”

It is striking that the spokesman of civil society called upon by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to address so historic a gathering was Mr. Techeste Aherom, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations. He was accorded this honor because as its cochair he had presided at the United Nations Millennium Forum. After all the national leaders had spoken and before the Summit had adopted its declaration on 8 September, Mr. Aherom made a speech in which he conveyed to that unprecedented assemblage a report of the Forum. The text of his speech is enclosed herewith.

For any observer imbued with the Bahá’í vision of peace and its inherent processes, the substance and implications of these recent events, seen together with previous world conferences that during the last decade also involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed to contemplate. It must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so early a stage in the Bahá’í era, representatives of our international community took part so notably in these occurrences that have set down milestones along the way towards that new World Order so clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat