THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2002

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The onrush of happenings within and without the Faith at the beginning of the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age presents a spectacle that is awe-inspiring. Inside the Cause, the historic importance of the events last May that marked the completion of the edifices on Mount Carmel dazzled the senses as their impact was instantly communicated throughout the planet by satellite broadcasts and by the most extensive media coverage ever accorded a Bahá'í occasion. As the latest evidences in the tangible unfolding of the Tablet of Carmel were laid bare in breathtaking splendor before the eyes of the world, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh leapt to new prominence in its continuing rise from obscurity. An indelible impression was thus registered in the annals of the Dispensation.

This outward manifestation of the vitality animating our irrepressible Faith has had its counterpart in the thrust of the internal processes at work since the inception last Ridván of the Five Year Plan. We are therefore moved to invite the delegates assembled at National Conventions and all other followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world to join us in reflecting on a few potent highlights of the operation of the Plan during its first year—highlights that cannot but rejoice hearts and inspire confidence in the incalculable potentialities of the course on which the Plan is set.

In their eager response to its requirements, National Spiritual Assemblies engaged in a series of planning sessions with Continental Counsellors before and immediately after Ridván. These set the pace for a vigorous launching distinguished by the steps taken to effectuate a new feature of the process of entry by troops. In each national community, Bahá'í institutions began the task of systematically mapping their country with the aim of sectioning it into clusters, each one being of a composition and size consonant with a scale of activities for growth and development that is manageable. Such a mapping, as has already been reported by some 150 countries, makes it possible to realize a pattern of well-ordered expansion and consolidation. Thus it creates as well a perspective, or vision, of systematic growth that can be sustained from cluster to cluster across an entire country. With this perspective, virgin clusters, like virgin territories identified in past campaigns, become goals for homefront pioneers, while opened clusters focus on their internal development mobilized by the mutually reinforcing work of the three constituent components of the Plan: the individual, the institutions and the community.

It is most encouraging to see that the progress of this work is being energized through the training institute process, which was considerably strengthened last year by the campaigns undertaken in many countries to increase the number of trained tutors. Where a training institute is well established and constantly functioning, three core activities—study circles, devotional meetings, and children's classes—have multiplied with relative ease. Indeed, the increasing participation of seekers in these activities, at the invitation of their Bahá'í friends, has lent a new dimension to their purposes, consequently effecting new enrollments. Here, surely, is a direction of great promise for the teaching work. These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops. By combining study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes within the framework of clusters, a model of coherence in lines of action has been put in place and is already producing welcome results. Worldwide application of this model, we feel confident, holds immense possibilities for the progress of the Cause in the years ahead.

These thrilling prospects were made the more viable by the enormous energy the International Teaching Centre invested in enriching the world community's understanding of systematic growth. Seizing the advantage afforded by the recent commencement of a new term of service for Auxiliary Board members, the Teaching Centre called for 16 regional orientation conferences to be held during the closing months of the year. To each of these it dispatched two of its members. In giving much focus to the theme "training institutes and systematic growth," the conferences, attended by all but a few of the Board members throughout the world, provided the participants with a wealth of information that will, through their tireless labors, suffuse the entire fabric of the community.

A community so richly endowed, so experienced, so focused on a divinely-inspired plan of action looks outward to a world whose inhabitants have, since the May 2001 events in the Holy Land, sunk more deeply into a slough of multiple disorders. And yet it is precisely under these seemingly inhospitable conditions that the Cause is meant to advance, and will thrive. The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, the newly released volume containing English translations of the full texts of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to the kings and rulers of the world, has come as a propitious reminder of the dire consequences of ignoring His warnings against injustice, tyranny and corruption. The violent shocks being inflicted on the consciousness of people everywhere emphasize the urgency of the remedy He has prescribed. We, the scattered bands of His loyal servants, have thus come again to a time of irresistible opportunities—opportunities to teach His Cause, to build up His wondrous System, to provide sacrificially the urgently needed material means on which the progress and execution of spiritual activities inevitably depend.

Our inescapable task is to exploit the current turmoil, without fear or hesitation, for the purpose of spreading and demonstrating the transformational virtue of the one Message that can secure the peace of the world. Has the Blessed Beauty not empowered and reassured us with potent words? "Let not the happenings of the world sadden you" is His loving counsel. "I swear by God," He continues; "The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you."

Unhampered by any doubts, unhindered by any obstacles, press on, then, with the Plan in hand.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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