

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2005

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The breakthroughs that have occurred in the Bahá'í world since the beginning of the fifth epoch of the Formative Age have brought us immeasurable joy. The past twelve months have been no exception. The Bahá'í community has continued its systematic advance and now, as it enters the final year of the Five Year Plan, finds itself in a position of remarkable strength—a strength acquired through strenuous, deliberate exertion by the friends everywhere to promote the process of entry by troops.

While inadequate to express the full significance of the developments taking place, the statistics suggest something of the scope of what is being achieved. The human resources of the Faith have steadily multiplied. Altogether, more than 200,000 worldwide have completed Book 1 of the Ruhi Institute, and many thousands have reached the level where they can effectively act as tutors of the study circles that, with increasing frequency, are held in every part of the globe, over 10,000 at the last count. The number of seekers engaged in the core activities has continued to climb, crossing the 100,000 mark several months ago. Meanwhile, some 150 clusters have developed to the point that intensive programs of growth either have been launched or stand ready to be initiated. There is every indication that this number will be substantially surpassed by the end of the Plan.

In celebrating these achievements, one should acknowledge, equally, the advances in learning that have given rise to them. Intensive institute campaigns, which pay due attention to the practice required, have remained the vehicle for stimulating growth at the cluster level. As the necessary conditions have thus been created, systematic programs for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith have been launched accordingly. A valuable body of knowledge about the nature of intensive programs of growth is accumulating, and certain features of these endeavors are now well understood. Such programs tend to consist of a series of cycles, each of several months' duration, devoted to planning, expansion, and consolidation. Human resource development proceeds uninterrupted from one cycle to the next, ensuring that the process of expansion not only is sustained but progressively gathers momentum. While undoubtedly many more lessons are still to be garnered, the experience already gained makes it possible to replicate the approach in an ever-increasing number of clusters around the world.

That the victories won have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions is gratifying indeed. At the heart of these accomplishments lies the continual enhancement of the spiritual life of Bahá'í communities everywhere. This new spiritual vitality accounts for the growing participation of people of diverse backgrounds in devotional meetings, children's classes and study circles, which, in many cases, has resulted in their recognition of Bahá'u'lláh as God's Manifestation for this Day and in their declaration of faith.

New developments have, likewise, taken place at the World Centre. We have decided that the time is propitious to bring into being an International Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh to guide and supervise the work of Regional and National Boards of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh throughout the world. It will operate in close collaboration with the Chief Trustee, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, and will be able to benefit from his knowledge and counsel in carrying out its duties. The three members now appointed to the International Board of Trustees are Sally Foo, Ramin Khadem, and Grant Kvalheim. Their term of office will be determined at a

later date. The members of the Board will not transfer their residence to the Holy Land but will utilize the services of the Office of Huqúqu'lláh at the World Centre in performing their functions.

At all levels and in every direction the Cause is achieving marked progress—from gains in expansion and consolidation at the grassroots to institutional -developments of an international scope. Such encouraging signs of the growing solidarity of the community come at a time when evidences of the decline in society are, alas, all too apparent. No need to review here the features of the breakdown in which a demoralized world is entrapped. Yet it should not be forgotten that it is precisely these circumstances which increase receptivity to the Teachings and create new opportunities for their diffusion.

In our message of 26 November 1999, we referred to a series of global enterprises designed to carry the Bahá'í community through the final years of the first century of the Faith's Formative Age. Each Plan, we indicated, would focus on the central aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. The first in the series, the current Five Year Plan, will draw to a close in twelve short months, when we will call upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh to embark on another Plan of five years' duration. What we ask the friends to do in the intervening period is to bend all their energies to put into resolute action the systematic learning being so vigorously promoted by the International Teaching Centre. No Bahá'í should lose the priceless opportunity afforded by the remaining days of the Plan to reinforce in this way the foundation for the launching next Ridván of an even more ambitious undertaking. Our most fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines will surround you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]