THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2007

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The first year of the Five Year Plan bears eloquent testimony to the spirit of devotion with which Bahá'u'lláh's followers have embraced the framework for action presented in our message of 27 December 2005 and their commitment to advancing the process of entry by troops. Where this framework has been applied coherently in all its dimensions in a cluster, steady progress is being achieved, both in terms of the participation of the believers and their friends in community life and in terms of numerical growth, with some clusters reporting enrolments in the hundreds every few months and others in scores. Vital to this development has been a heightened awareness of the spiritual nature of the enterprise, together with an increased understanding of those decision-making instruments that are defined by the principal features of the Plan.

Prior to our launching the current series of global Plans focused on the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops, the Bahá'í community had passed through a stage of rapid, large-scale expansion in many parts of the world—an expansion which ultimately was impossible to sustain. The challenge, then, lay not so much in swelling the ranks of the Cause with new adherents, at least from populations of proven receptivity, but in incorporating them into the life of the community and raising up from among them adequate numbers dedicated to its further expansion. So crucial was it for the Bahá'í world to address this challenge that we made it a central feature of the Four Year Plan and called upon National Spiritual Assemblies to spend the greater part of their energies creating institutional capacity, in the form of the training institute, to develop human resources. Ever-increasing contingents of believers, we indicated, would need to benefit from a formal programme of training designed to endow them with the knowledge and spiritual insights, with the skills and abilities, required to carry out the acts of service that would sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Today as we observe the workings of those clusters which are in a robust state of growth, we note that in every one of them the friends have continued to strengthen the institute process, while learning to mobilize their expanding nucleus of active supporters of the Faith, to establish an efficient scheme for the coordination of their efforts, to weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavours into an effective pattern of unified action, and to draw on the analysis of pertinent information in planning the cycles of their activities. That they have found the means for carrying forward the work of expansion and consolidation hand in hand—the key to sustained growth—is demonstrable. Such evidence will surely inspire every devoted believer to remain resolute on the path of systematic learning that has been set.

The accomplishments of these years of prodigious effort have not been confined to those clusters where the work of large-scale expansion and consolidation is being thus revitalized. The approach taken during the Four Year Plan, followed by the Twelve Month Plan and the previous Five Year Plan, proved instrumental in creating conditions for the believers to extend their endeavours to a wide circle of people, engaging them in various aspects of community life. The benefits of the decade-long process of capacity building in the three participants of the global Plans are now broadly apparent. Everywhere there was a need to gain an understanding of the dynamics of human resource development. Everywhere the friends had to learn the requirements of steady growth—to promote systematic action and to avoid distractions, to bring certain elements of collective decision-making close to the grassroots and to create communities with a sense of mission, to encourage universal participation and to accommodate different segments of society in

their activities, particularly children and junior youth, the future champions of the Cause of God and builders of His civilization.

With so firm a foundation in place, the foremost thought in the mind of each and every believer should be teaching. Whether in their personal efforts they teach their friends in firesides and then involve them in the core activities or use these activities as their primary instrument for teaching, whether as a community they make their work with children and junior youth the initial thrust in a cluster or focus first on the older generations, whether in their collective endeavours they visit families in teams as part of an intensive campaign or call on seekers in their homes periodically over time—these are decisions that can only be made according to the circumstances and possibilities of the friends and the nature of the populations with whom they interact. What all must acknowledge, irrespective of circumstance, are both the crying need of a humanity that, bereft of spiritual sustenance, is sinking deeper into despair and the urgency of the responsibility to teach with which we each have been entrusted as members of the community of the Greatest Name.

Bahá'u'lláh has commanded His followers to teach the Cause. Already thousands upon thousands are energetically applying the provisions of the Plan to open up avenues for them to guide souls to the Ocean of His Revelation. We look with expectant eyes to the day when teaching is the dominating passion in the life of every believer and when the unity of the community is so strong as to enable this state of enkindlement to express itself in unremitting action in the field of service. This, then, is our ardent hope for you and the object of our most fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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