

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

12 May 2008

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the worldwide Bahá'í community proceeds with a unified and coordinated endeavour to advance the process of entry by troops, developments of far-reaching significance at the Bahá'í World Centre, foreshadowed in our message of Riḍván 2006 to the Bahá'ís of the world, are now occurring.

The way has been opened to further beautification of the environs of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, the Qiblih of the people of Bahá, described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the "luminous Shrine" and "the place around which circumambulate the Concourse on high". After negotiations over several years, agreement has been reached with the Israeli government for the acquisition of a rectangular plot of land 90,000 square metres in area, located between Bahjí and the main road, which is currently being used by the government.

The property in the possession of the Faith has been further augmented by the conclusion, after negotiations which extended over some twenty years, of a land exchange with the Israel Land Administration, by which a portion of the land bequeathed to the Faith in the Ein Sara neighbourhood of Nahariya, north of 'Akká, is being exchanged for an additional 100,000 square metres to the east of the Mansion of Bahjí, an area of about 32,000 square metres adjoining the island at the Riḍván Garden, and the caravanserai adjacent to the Mansion of Mazra'ih. Discussions are continuing with the authorities for a further exchange, using more of the Ein Sara land to acquire additional property in close proximity to the Bahá'í Holy Places in the 'Akká area required to protect the sanctity and tranquillity of these places in the face of the rapid urbanization of the region.

Measures are now being taken to formulate a comprehensive plan for the development of these Holy Places in the years immediately ahead, in a manner which will preserve the distinctive characteristics evident when Bahá'u'lláh blessed them with His presence, while providing facilities for the growing number of pilgrims and visitors. Work has also been completed on the restoration of the Junayn Gardens, a small farmhouse and orchard north of Bahjí visited occasionally by Bahá'u'lláh, which was subsequently donated to the Faith.

An extensive project is now under way for the restoration of the Riḍván Garden to its condition when visited by Bahá'u'lláh at the termination of His nine-year confinement within the walls of the prison-city of 'Akká. Described by Him as "Our Verdant Isle" and as the "New Jerusalem", Bahá'u'lláh rejoiced in the tranquillity of the setting, "its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst." Included in the work being carried out here is the construction of a circulating water system, which will recreate the island frequented by Bahá'u'lláh, and the restoration of an antique flour mill, which was in use during His time.

No less significant is the work being carried out on Mount Carmel. The International Archives Building, constructed over fifty years ago at a time of limited resources in the Holy Land, is being extensively renovated and its facilities developed. This edifice, described by the Guardian as "the permanent and befitting repository for the priceless and numerous relics associated with the Twin Founders of the Faith, with the Perfect Exemplar of its teachings and with its heroes, saints and martyrs", is being strengthened structurally; provisions are being made to render it accessible to the disabled; the method of display of its relics is being improved; a comprehensive security

system is being provided; the exterior stonework is being restored; and its interior is being enhanced through installation of a granite floor.

Detailed plans have been prepared for the renovation of the Shrine of the Báb, the “majestic mausoleum” extolled by Shoghi Effendi as “the Queen of Carmel enthroned on God’s Mountain, crowned in glowing gold, robed in shimmering white, girdled in emerald green, enchanting every eye from air, sea, plain and hill.” This work will include installation of earthquake-resistant reinforcement not visible to pilgrims or visitors; preparation of the three chambers not previously available for meditation or worship; repair of the dome; and replacement of its tiles, which have become worn and discoloured, to return them to their pristine lustre.

The work being carried out at the World Centre of the Faith represents far more than repair, renovation, and beautification of buildings and gardens of historic significance. It can best be assessed by reference to Bahá’u’lláh’s designation of Mount Carmel as “the seat of God’s throne” and by recognition of His followers that the Qiblih is the holiest spot on the surface of the planet, while the places in which He found respite are forever sanctified by His presence. From that perspective those who participate in this endeavour, either through their dedicated labours or through their sacrificial contributions of funds, are privileged to an extent far beyond their capacity to comprehend.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]