

20 June 2008

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

Our 3 June 2008 letter expressed our appreciation for the courage and steadfastness that you have manifested during these difficult days and encouraged you to work diligently for the good of your fellow citizens and engage in conversations with them on matters of common concern. There are, of course, many pressing issues that occupy the minds of those striving to promote the prosperity and well-being of Iran. Chief among them is, no doubt, the critical need to remove barriers hindering the progress of women in society.

For you, the equality of men and women is not a Western construct but a universal spiritual truth—a statement about human nature—that was promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh nearly one hundred and fifty years ago in His native Iran. That women should enjoy equal rights with men is a requirement of justice. It is a principle consonant with the highest standard of purity and sanctity, whose application strengthens family life and is essential to the regeneration and progress of any nation. Indeed, peace in the world and the advancement of civilization depend on its realization. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained:

The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

You are particularly well placed to contribute to the promotion of this principle. Ṭáhirih, that peerless heroine of Iranian history, courageously advocated the emancipation of women in 1848, at a time when efforts to improve the status of women were only beginning to gather momentum in a few parts of the world. From that time on, you have raised generation after generation of your children—both boys and girls—to value this fundamental tenet of the Faith and to express it in every facet of their lives. In 1911, nearly a century ago, you founded the Tarbíyat School for Girls in Ṭíhrán, which provided girls of all backgrounds with an opportunity for education, encouraging, in this way, progressive thinking and making an indelible mark on society. For half a century now, Bahá'í women in Iran have worked shoulder to shoulder with men in administering the affairs of the community at the local, regional and national levels. And long ago you succeeded in eliminating in your community illiteracy among women under the age of forty.

Yet you are keenly aware that you cannot be content with your achievements to date. Rather must you persevere in your efforts to transcend cultural norms that impede the progress of women. True equality is not easily attained; the transformation required is difficult for men and women alike. We encourage you, then, to continue to enhance your understanding of the operation of this principle and to strive to uphold it more consistently in your family and community life. You can, in addition, draw upon your experience to discuss this issue with friends, neighbours and co-workers, especially the challenges it presents and ways of surmounting them, and participate in projects designed to advance the status of women, whether by government agencies or organizations of civil society.

Many of your compatriots are eager to see the realization of the universal principle of the equality of men and women. They will no doubt welcome you to join them in learning how to promote, step by step, conditions that enable the women of Iran to overcome impediments

blocking their progress and participate fully, as equals of men, in all areas of human endeavour. As you engage in so vital a field of service, you may be assured that our prayers are ever with you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]