

28 July 2008

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

During these days of hardship and tribulation when a new wave of persecution confronts you and while the dearly cherished souls who have served you so well remain imprisoned with no justification, you are continually in our thoughts and prayers. The profound love that fills our hearts whenever we call you to mind moves us to address you with greater frequency than before and to express our most affectionate sentiments to you. Our purpose, as you well know, is not to urge you to undertake any new programme of action, much less to add to the burden of your responsibilities or to call you to higher levels of sacrifice, for we are certain of your steadfastness and dedication to the Faith and confident that you never waver in carrying out the spiritual duties enjoined upon you by Bahá'u'lláh. Undeterred by the voices which insist that you believe but in silence, as if belief and the expression of it can be separated, you are engaged, wisely and unobtrusively, in exchanging views with your friends on themes central to the progress of Iran and its glorification.

At a time when Iranian society is being torn apart by long-standing prejudices of religion, ethnicity, gender and class, the experience of your community for more than a century and a half can serve as an abundant source of insight to the people of that land. On the one hand, you have been able not only to withstand but to reciprocate with loving kindness the most virulent form of religious prejudice, which has been perpetuated by the enemies of the Faith ever since its inception to distort public opinion. On the other, you have ceaselessly exerted effort to eliminate, both within your community and in your relations with others, prejudice of every kind.

The light that has ever illuminated your path is the principle of the oneness of humankind—the pivot around which revolve all of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. “The tabernacle of unity hath been raised,” you have taught your children from an early age, “regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.” Prejudice, you have maintained, cannot be counteracted with estrangement and enmity; one must transcend it through kindness and love. The foundation of all forms of prejudice, it has been your constant assertion, is ignorance, and it can be overcome, therefore, as the light of knowledge is diffused through concerted action and collaboration with others, for one of the most effective ways to rise above prejudice is to work in unison towards a common goal. You are well aware, of course, that the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, is inconsistent with any attempt to impose uniformity. Its watchword is unity in diversity. To accept it is to embrace the rich diversity that characterizes the human race. To promote it implies helping every soul to develop and express his or her God-given talents and capacities in service to humanity.

Since its earliest days, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has attracted to its ranks individuals from every segment of Iranian society. Conscious of the challenges involved in creating an environment free from prejudice, your community has diligently prepared educational programmes geared towards diverse age groups and has examined its social activities, as well as its administrative procedures, in order to narrow systematically the wide gulf that can separate people of different ethnic backgrounds, of different ages, of different strata, and of different sexes. It has, moreover, scrutinized and modified those practices based on social traditions, including the use of everyday language, that can consciously or unconsciously foster prejudice. That such strong bonds of unity and mutual understanding have emerged among numerous families over the generations, both through the marriage of those of different religious backgrounds and through social interactions, stands as vivid testimony to the success which your efforts have achieved. What is most

significant, however, is that you are engaged in a process of learning how to build unity and that your experience in this regard may prove beneficial to others.

Persevere, therefore, with diligence and steadfastness along this path of endeavour. As you do so, strive to perceive the nobility in every human being—rich or poor, man or woman, old or young, city dweller or villager, worker or employer, irrespective of ethnicity or religion. Help the poor and deprived. Attend to the needs of young people and foster in them confidence in the future so that they may prepare themselves adequately for service to humankind. Take every opportunity to present to your fellow citizens, with utmost sincerity, your experience in combating prejudice and collaborate with them in creating bonds of love and fellowship, and so contribute to the progress of your nation and the prosperity of its people.

Not a moment passes that you are not in our thoughts. At every turn we remember you and take pride in retelling the accounts of your fortitude and fidelity. Our constant prayers are with you, and in the Holy Shrines we beseech the Blessed Beauty to protect and sustain you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]