

The Universal House of Justice

20 October 2008

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Today, the anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, marks the midway point of the five-year enterprise that will engage the Bahá'í world until Riḍván 2011. We bow our heads in humble gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh for the favours and confirmations He has vouchsafed unto those labouring so diligently and sacrificially in the forefront of the teaching work. Since the conclusion of the Tenth International Bahá'í Convention a few months ago, there has been a rise in awareness of the efficacy of the framework governing the operation of the Five Year Plan as insights gained by the delegates have been widely diffused throughout the Bahá'í community. Scores of clusters around the globe are being primed for systematic expansion, and we expect to see a wave of intensive programmes of growth launched in the months leading up to Riḍván next year.

The challenge facing the friends in these and all clusters continues to be twofold in character. While learning to identify receptive segments of society and share with responsive souls the message of the Faith—an aspiration generally not difficult to fulfil—they are striving to understand in practice how the diverse elements of a healthy pattern of growth, particularly the development of human resources, are to be integrated into a cohesive whole. How heartening it is to see that the moment the friends in a cluster begin to meet this dual challenge, immediate progress is achieved; the goal of launching an intensive programme of growth becomes imminently attainable.

That the continued strengthening of the community should be matched by a further decline in the old world order comes as no surprise. Indeed, the friends should be on their guard, lest the development of capacity in the community not keep pace with the rise in receptivity of a disillusioned humanity. Behold how even in the short span of time since we raised this warning in our Riḍván message, financial structures once thought to be impregnable have tottered and world leaders have shown their inability to devise more than temporary solutions, a failing to which they increasingly confess. Whatever expedient measures are adopted, confidence has been shaken and a sense of security lost. Surely such developments have caused the believers in every land to reflect on the lamentable condition of the present order and have reinforced in them the conviction that material and spiritual civilization must be advanced together.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we turn our hearts in frequent prayer to Bahá'u'lláh and beseech Him to strengthen His followers through His unfailing grace. In such moments, we implore Him to illumine their souls with the light of knowledge and faith. Let them not underestimate the power inherent in the system they are putting in place for the propagation of His Faith, nor mistake the true purpose of the global enterprise on which they have embarked. Let them not deviate from the path of learning on which they are set, nor be distracted by the ephemeral pursuits of a bewildered society. Let them not fail to appreciate the value of the culture now taken root in the community that promotes the systematic study of the Creative Word in small groups in order to build capacity for service. Let them never forget the imperative to tend to the needs of the children of the world and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. Let them come to realize the full significance of their efforts to help young people form a strong moral identity in their early adolescent years and empower them to contribute to the well-being of their communities. And let them rejoice at having learned through consistent, systematic action how to establish a rhythm of growth that pays due attention to the essential elements of expansion, consolidation, reflection and planning. May they one and all be endowed with constancy and fidelity and be granted the

courage to make whatever sacrifices are needed to ensure the resounding success of the Plan. By the rectitude of their conduct, the sincerity of their love for their fellow human beings, and the ardour of their desire to serve the peoples of the world, may they vindicate the truth proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh that humanity is one. May they be diligent in their efforts to establish ties of friendship that show no regard for prevalent social barriers and ceaselessly endeavour to bind hearts together in the love of God. That they may recognize the profound implications of their mission is our fervent hope. That they may not falter in accomplishing their ambitious goals, no matter how severe the crises engulfing the world around them, is our most heartfelt prayer at the Sacred Threshold.

To provide the opportunity for the friends to gather together, as much to celebrate the feats already achieved during the Plan as to deliberate on its current exigencies, we announce the convocation of a series of regional conferences, forty-one in number, to be held in the following cities between November and March: Abidjan, Accra, Almaty, Antofagasta, Atlanta, Auckland, Baku, Bangalore, Bangui, Battambang, Bologna, Bukavu, Chicago, Dallas, Frankfurt, Guadalajara, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Kiev, Kolkata, Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Lae, London, Los Angeles, Lubumbashi, Lusaka, Madrid, Managua, Manila, Nakuru, New Delhi, Portland, Quito, São Paulo, Stamford, Sydney, Toronto, Ulaanbaatar, Vancouver, Yaoundé. To each of these conferences, two members of the International Teaching Centre will be sent as our representatives. National Spiritual Assemblies in hosting countries will have further details available regarding participation. We urge the believers, both those fully engaged in executing the provisions of the Plan and those whose circumstances have prevented them from fulfilling their desire to do so until now, to avail themselves of this opportunity and attend the conference to be held in their area.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]