

31 October 2008

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

In recent months the Bahá'ís of the world have witnessed, with pleasure and gratitude, the courageous and unprecedented steps taken by open-minded Iranians in defence of the civil rights of their fellow citizens persecuted for their beliefs. At the same time, however, a small segment of the population, manipulated by the forces of hatred and prejudice, has become the cause of further difficulty for the Bahá'í community. Yet, in a climate fostered by the dissemination of misinformation and widespread calumny, unmatched in its intensity, in which Bahá'ís are barred from using the media to defend themselves, those under the influence of such forces cannot be held entirely to blame.

In the face of such adversity, you remain confident in the ability of the Iranian people to discern truth and strive wisely to correct misleading information. May you not slacken in this task. Be not dismayed by the severity of the attacks made against you. Do not yield to despondency and despair. Perseverance and patience are required to counteract the effects of slander and calumny. The ultimate outcome is clear: the light of truth will dispel the darkness of deceit.

One of the accusations being put forward is that the Bahá'ís of Iran maintain political ties with foreign powers and act against the interests of their own country and government. You should take every opportunity to explain to your fellow citizens the fundamental principle of the Faith that strictly prohibits involvement in partisan political activity of any kind, whether local, national or international. Bahá'ís view government as a system for maintaining the welfare and orderly progress of human society, and obedience to the laws of the land is a distinguishing feature of their beliefs. Iran is dear to the Bahá'ís, who are the well-wishers of all. In whatever country they reside, including the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh, they strive to promote the welfare of society. They are enjoined to work alongside their compatriots in fostering fellowship and unity and in establishing peace and justice. They seek to uphold their own rights, as well as the rights of others, through whatever legal means are available to them, conducting themselves at all times with honesty and integrity. They eschew conflict and dissension. They avoid contest for worldly power. Neither do they aspire to overthrow governments, nor do they participate in the schemings of others to do so. The record of the past one hundred and sixty years bears witness to this assertion.

There are those who, either lacking proper information or promoting their own political agendas, regard the establishment of the Bahá'í World Centre in Israel as a political statement—as evidence of ties to the Zionist movement. Yet anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of historical facts knows that the location of the World Centre can be attributed to the machinations of the Iranian government itself. It was that government which exiled Bahá'u'lláh from His native Persia and instigated His final banishment to the Holy Land—then under the sovereignty of the Ottoman empire—some one hundred and forty years ago, eighty years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. The relationship of the World Centre with that State is governed by the same principles being followed by any Bahá'í community—it is characterized by obedience to the laws of the land and a strict abstention from partisan politics. In your efforts to address this issue, you might find it helpful to refer to the response given by Shoghi Effendi, as the Head of the Faith, to an inquiry made by Judge Emil Sandström, acting on behalf of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine formed in 1947, which was then seeking the views of various religious and non-religious groups on the future of that land. In a letter dated 14 July 1947, a year prior to the birth of the State of Israel, Shoghi Effendi made clear the Bahá'í position of non-involvement

in partisan politics, indicating that the Faith did not identify with any side “in the present tragic dispute going on over the future of the Holy Land”. “As many of the adherents of our Faith are of Jewish and Muslim extraction”, he further stated, “we have no prejudice towards either of these groups and are most anxious to reconcile them for their mutual benefit and for the good of the country.”

Indeed, how regrettable it is that Bahá'ís should be accused of any malevolence towards Islám. Certainly you would be prepared to share with those who make such accusations the Bahá'í Writings which refer to Islám as “the blessed and luminous religion of God” and the Prophet Muḥammad as “the refulgent lamp of supreme Prophethood”, “the Lord of creation” and “the Day-star of the world”, Who, “through the will of God, shone forth from the horizon of Ḥijáz”. You would also no doubt be ready to cite passages that speak of the station of Imám ‘Alí in terms such as “the moon of the heaven of knowledge and understanding” and “the sovereign of the court of knowledge and wisdom”. Recite with them the Tablet of Visitation revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself for Imám Ḥusayn, whom He calls “the pride of the martyrs” and “the day-star of renunciation shining above the horizon of creation”. Read to them passages from the talks delivered some one hundred years ago by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in churches and synagogues, and among scholars in Europe and North America, on the station and importance of Islám. Share with them the account of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's funeral, which was attended by countless people from the region, including thousands of Muslims, who came to pay homage to Him, and acquaint them with the eulogies that the Muftí of Haifa and other Muslim leaders delivered in His honour on that occasion.

Curtailling the spread of slander and calumny is not your only challenge. Various social and economic pressures—not least the denial to Bahá'í youth of access to higher education and the hostility faced by Bahá'í schoolchildren in some places—continue to mount. By contrast, a growing portion of the populace praises your courage, audacity, patience and steadfastness before the rising tide of tribulations. The resolve shown by the vast majority of believers, preferring to live with hardship rather than to seek refuge in other countries, seen by many as a sign of their love for their homeland, has earned great respect.

There appear to be some who are poised, at present, to exploit the least trace of ill feeling they perceive among the believers, imagining they can make it the cause of strife and dissension in your community and weaken your morale. You realize full well, of course, the paramount importance of preserving and strengthening the unity of the community. Shielded by the power of the Covenant, you and your spiritual forebears have withstood for more than a century and a half the relentless attacks of the enemies, some of whom arose to discredit the Cause publicly, while others, in the guise of good intentions, set out to sow the seeds of discord within its ranks. You are well aware that “disunity destroyeth the divine edifice and sloweth the spread of the Cause”, and in your deeds and conduct, you have manifested the words of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá: “This day is the day of unity and this time is the time of harmony. Unity and harmony will lay low the people of malice”.

While the peoples of the world are still in the earliest stages of learning to coexist, you are being schooled by the wisdom of the beloved Master in the workings of unity and concord among nations. You have faith in their constructive powers. You must consider now, more than ever before, what will be conducive to strengthening the bonds of love and fellowship among the believers in these difficult times, beseeching continually God's confirmations.

By adhering to the Divine teachings and following the guidance of the Centre of the Faith, you have succeeded in achieving unity of thought on issues concerning service to the Cause and the advancement of spiritual civilization. May you recognize the value of this accomplishment and not underestimate its significance. You are also mindful of one essential, practical point, namely: that believers differ in their capacity, aptitude and approach, in their understanding, wisdom and spiritual discipline, in their degree of commitment and willingness to sacrifice, as well as in their personal preferences and priorities. As members of a diverse but united community, then, you

must remain, one and all, as tightly bound as threads in the cord of the Covenant to which all must cling. Be at all times a source of encouragement and support to one another, and together seek after new avenues of service. In association with friends, neighbours and acquaintances, may you dispel the darkness of iniquity and tyranny with the light of love and fidelity. Pay no heed to rumours. Rather may you draw sustenance from the power of unity and rely upon the penetrating influence of “holy words and pure and goodly deeds” and “a virtuous life and a goodly behaviour”—this, that you may become the cause of love, unity and harmony within your community and among your fellow citizens. Be confident that every step taken in the path of God with sincerity will attract heavenly confirmations, for He “imparteth to the drop the power of the sea, and turneth the atom into a very sun.”

Be assured of our constant prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]