

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT
[AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

22 January 2010

Transmitted by email: ...

Mr. ...

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter dated 11 January 2010 inquiring about the principles that, under present conditions, should guide the Iranian believers in their participation in the life of society. The House of Justice appreciates your desire to promote the best interests of the Faith, as well as the clarity and penetrating insight of your questions, and has requested us to respond on its behalf.

As you are well aware, in present-day Iran, fundamental questions of social justice and public welfare have become entangled with sectarian political concerns. This has made it difficult for Bahá'ís, who love their country and cherish great aspirations for its progress, to determine the best course of action to take. It is hoped that the following comments will be of assistance to the friends in choosing how to proceed.

Members of the Bahá'í community, wherever they reside, avoid engaging in partisan politics or meddling in political relations among governments, refraining at all times from becoming involved in the contest for worldly power. They have chosen this path in accordance with the teachings of their Faith, that they might focus their attention on working towards the greater goal of establishing a united and prosperous society. This choice is not intended as a criticism of any particular political party or of the approach taken by other groups. Needless to say, in following this path Bahá'ís categorically reject any form of sedition or recourse to violence.

While eschewing partisan political activity, Bahá'ís are to vigorously engage in constructive public discourse and in a wide range of social endeavours aimed at the betterment of the world and the progress of their respective nations. They undertake such activities with humility, discernment and respect for prevailing laws and social conditions, in a spirit of learning and in collaboration with like-minded groups and individuals, fully confident in the power inherent in the principle of unity in diversity and in the efficacy of mutual aid and cooperation.

As to the question of taking part in demonstrations, individual Bahá'ís in every country are, in principle, free to participate in efforts and activities, for instance in peaceful rallies, that aim to further laudable objectives such as the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights. However, should such activities begin to deviate from their original purpose and assume a partisan character or degenerate into violence, they must of course be avoided.

It is natural that young Bahá'ís in Iran would aspire to work together with their fellow citizens to promote justice and the common weal. The administrative institutions of the Faith are intended to serve as a means for channelling the energies of the believers and organizing the religious and social affairs of the Bahá'í community. Individual Bahá'ís, therefore, often consult with the institutions in determining how they can best serve as individuals. Circumstances in Iran, however, have placed the friends there in a unique situation. Until a year ago, the Bahá'ís benefited from the counsel and services of informal groups that, with the full knowledge of the

government, were tending to the spiritual and social needs of the community. In the wake of statements made by the country's Prosecutor General in February 2009 and the subsequent suspension of the activities of these groups, the House of Justice reassured the believers that, drawing on the power of unity and mutual support, and relying upon Divine confirmations, they would be able to devise appropriate measures both for managing their spiritual and social affairs and for serving their country and their compatriots. The House of Justice encouraged the friends to take counsel together and to have every confidence that, through adherence to the principles of Bahá'í consultation, their decisions and actions would be guided by wisdom and circumspection. Bahá'í youth, then, would do well to consult with their parents, family members and others whose judgement they trust about the nature of their participation in social action.

In such consultations, the friends will no doubt readily acknowledge that participation in demonstrations is by no means the only way, or even the most effective way, to contribute to the advancement of society. Whether in the discharge of their personal spiritual obligations or in their commitment to the call for "pure and goodly deeds" and for "commendable and seemly conduct", whether through their participation in the fruitful discourses of society—perhaps through writing articles as you suggest—or through their involvement in activities of social and economic development, Bahá'ís should recognize the numerous ways in which they can work alongside their fellow citizens to promote the welfare of their country.

Mistakes might well be made in pursuit of such an aim, but the friends must not criticize one another; nor should they allow differences of opinion or apparent contradictions between various lines of action to disrupt their unity or diminish their love and affection for one another. Rather must they persist in their efforts and strive to learn from the results of their endeavours. The friends should remain ever mindful that some officials are seeking by every possible means to undermine the very existence of the Bahá'í community. Resorting to the use of lies and calumnies, they portray the community as a political entity or as the enemy of Islam, or even, on occasion, as an agent of foreign powers. They go so far as to label as "Bahá'í" certain Iranians working for the betterment of the country, hoping in this way to discredit them in the eyes of the public. More recently, they have seized upon the arrest of a few young friends in connection with the events of Áshúrâ to falsely accuse the Bahá'ís, particularly through the press, of helping to organize the demonstrations, of carrying arms, and of threatening the interests of the country while, supposedly, acting under the instruction of the institutions of the Faith. The primary purpose underlying such accusations is to spread prejudice among the masses and to discourage Bahá'ís from taking an active role in society. Even the noblest efforts of the Bahá'ís are not exempt from the malicious designs of these officials. The arrest and imprisonment in 2006 of those youth in Shiráz who were rendering a welcome and much-needed service to children from less privileged families is but one example.

Over the past three decades the community of the Greatest Name has suffered grievously in the Cradle of the Faith. During the same period, the noble people of Iran, having gained a deeper understanding of many social issues, underwent a profound evolution in their thinking. Fair-minded Iranians today can no longer ignore the absurdity of the accusations made against the Bahá'ís, whom they regard as loyal compatriots, entitled to the same rights accorded to every other citizen. Indeed, few, if any at all, see the label "Bahá'í", so often attached to those who hold progressive views, as a stigma. The actions of young Bahá'ís, animated by their love for their homeland and its people, and brimming with vitality and enthusiasm, have contributed significantly to this change in attitude. The House of Justice conveys to them its warmest expressions of admiration and praise, as well as its confidence that, through prayer and meditation, and with support and encouragement from their elders, they will be assisted in choosing the most judicious means for fulfilling their commitment to social progress and in observing the dictates of wisdom in all their undertakings.

We are to assure you of the prayers of the Universal House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf, as well as on behalf of the dear youth of Iran. May you succeed in attaining God's good pleasure and in performing such deeds as will contribute to the material and spiritual progress of the people of that blessed land.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat