

21 March 2011

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

At the advent of the ancient and auspicious Persian festival of Naw-Rúz, the close of the blessed days of fasting and the commencement of a new year, we take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt greetings to every one of you, sincere servants of the All-Merciful, and, through you, to the entire Iranian nation.

It is customary among the nations that a day of general rejoicing be appointed when people come together with joy and gladness and renew the bonds of affection. The day of Naw-Rúz is a reminder of the grandeur and glory of the ancient land of Iran and a symbol of the abiding greatness and distinction of its peoples. This time-honoured tradition is an occasion for all to celebrate and rejoice, to show forth love and kindness, to leave aside rancor and enmity, and to seek inward and outward renewal. From the earliest times, the people of Iran have revered and sanctified this splendid day. The Bahá'ís of the world, too, comprising peoples of every race and origin in over two hundred countries and territories, celebrate this glorious day under the same fair name of "Naw-Rúz" and strive, following the counsels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to ensure that the outcome of the day not remain "limited to the fruits of mere pleasure", but that it herald great undertakings aimed at furthering the common weal.

The year just ended saw a continuation of the dire hardships, persecutions and injustices that have been heaped upon you. The chief perpetrators of this oppression are those whose hearts and souls have been possessed by the evil of ignorance and fanaticism, which has robbed them of benevolence and nobility. They have become instruments of violence and cruelty to their fellow human beings and have deprived their own souls of the grace of divine bestowals. Others among your compatriots recognize your innocence, and in their hearts sincerely wish to treat you with justice, but, in the prevailing militarized climate, are impelled to carry out the instructions of their superiors and thus become reluctant participants in this tyranny.

Yet, we render thanks to God that in the course of this year you have witnessed, both within your country and beyond its borders, the spirit of solidarity shown by countless noble-hearted, fair-minded and enlightened Iranians; that you have heard the call of national and international institutions of civil society that has been raised in support of your rights; that you have been informed of the numerous resolutions and declarations that have been issued by national and international bodies in your defence; and that you have won the admiration of the world for your calm and constructive resilience. Your spiritual kin throughout the world, drawing inspiration from the example of your service and sacrifice, have likewise sallied forth in the arena of service with determination and resolve, and remember you continually in their prayers at the Threshold of the Lord of bounty.

We are delighted that, having studied our message of Ridván 2010, you also benefited from reflecting on the successes achieved by the followers of the Blessed Beauty across the globe in carrying out the provisions of the Five Year Plan as they learned to empower people to take responsibility for their own spiritual, social and intellectual development. And, as mentioned in that message, you yourselves continued to offer, to the extent possible, your own contribution to this divine enterprise. At Ridván 2011 the next stage of the mighty undertaking in which the Bahá'í world is engaged will commence. Our message dated 28 December 2010 to the Continental Counsellors explains the requirements of the Plan. Bahá'ís throughout the world eagerly anticipate further accomplishments in carrying out its provisions. Each and every one of you, young or old, will undoubtedly also seek, with full determination and as far as conditions permit,

to advance on the path of service, whether by fulfilling your individual spiritual responsibilities or by availing yourselves of other opportunities that may arise.

The world is in turmoil, and the onrushing tide of change is proceeding with unparalleled force and speed. The age-old order of the world has been disrupted, and the profound transformations that have taken place at all levels of human relationships call for a fundamental reconsideration of every aspect of life. This applies equally to Iranian society. Consider how its people are resolutely striving to establish a progressive society and are ready to bear every manner of pain and calamity in pursuit of this objective. The season of Naw-Rúz and the renewal of the world of nature are an invitation to reinvigorate the powers of the spirit and to re-examine matters of the heart and conscience. It is befitting that in this vernal season, this outward symbol of the spiritual springtide, in your meaningful conversations with your friends, neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues and other like-minded souls, you explore together how better to contribute to the material and spiritual welfare of others and to build a society in which the innate talents of every individual can flourish without regard to distinctions of class, creed, gender or ethnicity. Ponder together the true purpose of the world of existence and the life of man; consider the beauty and efficacy of a society founded on the principle of unity in diversity; and deliberate on that essential nobility of the soul that enables the individual to see his or her own happiness in the happiness of others. Leave the oppressors to God and call to mind the admonition of Bahá'u'lláh: "O Oppressors on earth! Withdraw your hands from tyranny, for I have pledged Myself not to forgive any man's injustice." Look beyond the hardships that have encompassed you on every side and fix your gaze on the sublime vision of the faith of God for the betterment of the world and the happiness of the nations. Following the model of the lives of the Central Figures of our Faith and that of your spiritual forebears, persist in the noble example that you yourselves have set over the last thirty some years and remain patient and composed under difficulties. Persevere in your inspiring sacrifice, and do your share to build a world and an Iran that are united, prosperous and free.

Our prayers in the Holy Shrines are with every one of you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]