[AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

14 May 2011

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved friends

The third anniversary of the imprisonment of the former members of the Yárán serves as a reminder of the difficult conditions that continue to afflict the Bahá'í community of Iran. The perpetuation of so egregious a situation—its underlying foundations and its far-reaching implications for the future of a country once a standard-bearer of human rights—gives Iranians everywhere cause for reflection.

That the seven former members of the Yárán are, in truth, prisoners of conscience is today incontrovertible. Repeated reference to these seven in the world's media stands as a mark of protest by so many nations against the wrongs being perpetrated upon the Bahá'ís of Iran, young and old, solely on the basis of their religious belief: the children who are constantly demeaned and disparaged in the classroom and who are left with no choice but, in all meekness, to defend their human dignity; the parents who, filled with sadness, must explain to them such inhumane treatment while preventing the seeds of resentment and hatred from taking root in their innocent hearts; the youth who are deprived of higher education and their parents who are themselves denied employment and professional opportunities and who must bear the further burden of being unable to meet the needs of their children; the scores of individuals who have committed no wrong yet, contrary to all legal norms, are arrested, harshly interrogated, incarcerated in the most vile jails and denied the most basic rights accorded to every prisoner; the families that, because of the severe threats made by security agents against those who associate with Bahá'ís, must circumscribe relationships with neighbours and friends; the rank and file of the Bahá'í community that must endure a life of perpetual uncertainty as a result of the widespread dissemination by the authorities of hateful and offensive propaganda against the Faith in the mass media; and the many believers who, in cities and villages throughout Iran, are made to witness the burning of their homes, farms, and places of work, and even the desecration of the graves of their loved ones. Yet all pleas for redress remain unheard.

Bahá'ís, of course, are not alone in their plight. Many other noble-minded men and women of Iran, deprived of their rights and subjected to injustices, have likewise accepted to bear countless hardships. With admirable courage, they have faced the direst iniquities, refusing to bow before the demands of ignorant prejudice and baseless superstition—this, in the defence of freedom and human rights and, ultimately, for the progress and prosperity of their nation.

The constructive resilience you have displayed is not lost on the attentive observer, nor are its powerful effects. Consider how over the past three years, though deprived of the guidance of the Yárán and the Khádimín, the Bahá'í community has continued, as a result of the exertions made by each one of you and with the aid of heavenly confirmations, to manage its affairs; how the scope of individual initiative has widened and group consultation has yielded such abundant fruit; how every one of you, whether in spacious environs or in the narrow confines of prison, has shone brightly, even as a candle lit by the hand of the Almighty, shedding the light of hope and love on all those in your midst; how the unity of the community, the solidarity of its members and their ability to attend to one another's needs have increased; how their relations with friends and co-workers have flourished; how their dynamism as a community in service to others has risen; and how the contingents of those attracted to the Beloved have continued to expand. Not only have the many hardships you have borne been instrumental in awakening the conscience of the noble people of Iran, but the Bahá'í community worldwide, reinforced by the energies released through your sacrifices, has seen a significant increase in its capacity to contribute to the spiritual

empowerment of people, enabling them to take charge of their own spiritual, social and material development. Moreover, growing numbers, particularly those in the younger generations, have been moved to study the fundamental verities of the Faith, and their desire to take part in the great enterprise upon which the Bahá'í world is embarked has intensified accordingly.

By the same token, the spurious character of the accusations levelled at Bahá'ís by fanatical elements has now been made plain, both in Iran and elsewhere. The hopes of long-standing avowed enemies of the Faith to undermine the foundations of the community of the Most Great Name in the land of its birth have been dashed, and the words and deeds of the country's officials been discredited in the eyes of the public. Meanwhile, persecution has spread to the general populace; brutality and oppression have become so pervasive as to leave no citizen untouched. To all appearances, government officials remain wholly ignorant of the truth, borne out by history, that injustice and oppression can never assure any regime's ultimate survival. Examine how the ideas and aspirations of individuals have been ignored and their human rights constantly trampled. It is as though the well-being, the progress, and the happiness of the people are of the least concern to the authorities. The painful consequences of these atrocities are all too clear. In His weighty Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh, the distinguished Son of that land, calls on the rulers of the world to become the embodiments of justice and fairness, cautions them to guard against placing their reliance on wealth, power, and armies, and exhorts them to desist from tyranny. He reminds them that the true treasure of every nation is its people and admonishes them to beware, lest they deliver their sacred trust to the hands of the robber. Those in authority, He declares, would do well to choose for their people that which they choose for themselves, to eschew pride and vainglory, to avoid expending the wealth of the nation for their personal satisfaction, to refrain from imposing hardships upon their people, and to fear the sighs and lamentations of the oppressed. Should they so act, Bahá'u'lláh affirms, no need to amass weapons of war will remain; freedom, peace and tranquillity will be established, and their countries and their people will attain true prosperity.

The hope expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and cherished by every Bahá'í, is that Iran will evince those noble qualities which will "bring immortality to all on earth" and "raise on the highest summits the banner of public order, of purest spirituality, of universal peace." It is this spiritual vision that enables you, despite the hardships and strictures imposed upon you, to remain so ardent in your desire to serve that land. Therefore, keep fixed before your eyes God's consummate wisdom and His unfailing promises; look to the future with optimism; dedicate your lives, as you have always done, to serving humanity; continue to fulfil your individual spiritual responsibilities; engage in meaningful conversation in those social spaces open to you; and participate, to the extent possible, in undertakings and efforts directed towards the common good. Pursue with confidence the path you have chosen, and rest assured that, in the fortitude and endurance you display in the face of such trials and afflictions, you walk in the footsteps of the beloved Master.

We offer supplications in the Holy Shrines on behalf of each and every one of you, calling to mind these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

> The friends of Iran are dearer to me than life and soul, for in the path of God they have suffered severe trials, sustained grievous afflictions, seen their homes plundered, become the target of the slings and arrows of rebuke and reproach, offered up their very lives, and emerged from the crucible of trials and tribulations radiant as pure gold. Thus, in the estimation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá they are more precious than life itself, and before the Concourse on high they are the object of honour and esteem. Shouldst thou come upon any of these souls, embrace and kiss that pure being on my behalf, that my soul may find boundless delight and my heart be wholly rejoiced.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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