

29 January 2014

To the Bahá'í youth in the Cradle of the Faith

Almost a year has passed since we called the Bahá'í youth throughout the world to a higher recognition of the significant contribution they are to make to the regeneration of the world and the unity of its peoples, and invited them to join those in the vanguard of service to humankind. In doing so they were asked to recognize that countless other young people aspire to the same vision of unity, justice, and prosperity by which they themselves have been galvanized. To consider this critical responsibility, we encouraged them to participate together with their close friends in an unprecedented series of 114 conferences spanning the globe.

The conferences were an occasion for the participants to reflect on the astonishing powers and unique capacities associated with the period of youth and to consider deeply those societal forces that exert themselves on the youth—forces that aim to distract them from significant social change, weaken their commitment to service, ensnare them in consumerism, and dissuade them from belief in their own God-given capacity and that of others. The participants considered, too, practical ways in which to counter those effects, build bonds of friendship and profound connection, promote unity, and equip themselves with the concepts needed to succeed in constructing a new world through collective endeavour.

The admirable response of the Bahá'í youth and thousands of their friends offered another glimpse of the fulfilment of Bahá'u'lláh's hope that in the heyday of life and their prime of youth souls would arise in service. By any measure—the strenuous and at times heroic efforts they made to attend, the depth of understanding and insight they attained, or the enthusiasm and determination they demonstrated to transform their world and serve their society—the initial outcome of these gatherings was extraordinary.

You have certainly heard the news of these conferences and may indeed have seen the beautiful images and films from the gatherings; you may even have had the chance to study with others the concepts and themes that were the central feature of the gatherings. Undoubtedly you will derive a fresh measure of energy and zeal as you reflect on these concepts and consider the implications they hold for your lives and for your circumstances.

As the valiant youth in the Cradle of the Faith, you are well aware of your mission to be a source of hope to those around you, to be channels of love and affection, to be symbols of forgiveness and patience, of serenity and strength to your compatriots, and above all, to be in the front ranks of that process by which the worldwide community has learned to build capacity for service, heighten unity, deepen understanding, and hone abilities so that purposeful action for the benefit of mankind may ensue. Through the spiritual and social transformation thus promoted, the Bahá'í world has come to realize that what is being cultivated is a process that enhances orientation to service and commitment to the application of the divine precepts—a process that holds far-reaching implications for the life of the individual and for the betterment of the world.

We know, of course, the privations and limitations under which you labour. Whether in pursuing your education, earning a livelihood, working towards your legitimate aspirations, or practicing your faith, your freedoms are curtailed by many an injustice. From the very beginning the compatriots of Bahá'u'lláh have shared in the suffering He sustained. You are the embodiments of these words of the Master: "Thou didst follow in the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty and didst drink a cup from the ocean of His tribulations." But you know, too, that it is precisely your staunchness that lends such lustre to the qualities your community exhibits. You may be sure that it is not only history that tells of the courage and steadfastness of your community, but that the significance of a community that under severe and sustained oppression

has remained forward looking, dynamic, vibrant, and committed to serve its society, is not lost on those who dispassionately view your present situation. Perhaps the most compelling and clear example of your constructive resilience is evident currently in your earnest striving for knowledge, in your commitment to the loftiest values of faith and reason which the Cause inculcates, and in your perseverance in pursuit of higher education. The world can see a community that has rejected the label of victim and chosen instead to draw on the highest reservoirs of solidarity and collaboration in its resolve to advance as a living entity—that its youth might progress and attain the heights of learning and that society itself benefit therefrom.

“The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day.” With these words did the Ancient Beauty warn humankind about its immediate future. “Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly.” You surely see how throughout the world the light of true religion is fading. Yet, you are the very examples of what illumination this light can bring. You are living proofs that religion promotes upright character, instils forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, magnanimity, high-mindedness. It prohibits harm to others and invites souls to the plane of sacrifice, that they may give of themselves for the good of others. It imparts a world-embracing vision and cleanses the heart from self-centredness and prejudice. It inspires souls to build unity, to endeavour for material and spiritual betterment for all, to see their own happiness in that of others, to advance learning and science, to be an instrument of true joy, and to revive the body of humankind. It burnishes the mirror of the soul until it reflects the qualities of the spirit with which it has been endowed. And then the power of the divine attributes is manifested in the individual and collective lives of humanity and aids the emergence of a new social order. Such is the true conception of religion set forth in the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Praised be God that you are ever striving to model your lives after the sublime pattern enshrined in His Teachings.

We offer supplications at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]