

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1 August 2014

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Over two years have elapsed since our announcement at Riḍván 2012 of projects to raise two national and five local Houses of Worship, to be pursued in conjunction with the construction in Santiago, Chile, of the last of the continental Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. These undertakings, inextricably linked to the development of community life now being fostered everywhere through acts of devotion and service, are further steps in the sublime task entrusted to humanity by Bahá'u'lláh to build Houses of Worship “throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions”—centres in which souls may gather “harmoniously attuned one to another” to hear the divine verses and to offer supplications, and from which “the voices of praise may rise to the Kingdom” and the “fragrance of God” be diffused.

We are deeply moved by the response in every part of the world to our call. Particularly in the nations and localities recently designated for the construction of a House of Worship, we have witnessed the friends' spontaneous expressions of joy; their immediate and heartfelt commitment to lend their share in carrying out the critical work at hand and to increase the dynamism of those activities integral to the emergence of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár within a population; their sacrificial contributions of time, energy, and material resources, in a variety of forms; and their sustained efforts to awaken growing contingents to the vision of those edifices dedicated wholly to the remembrance of God that will be founded in their midst. Indeed, the ready response of the community of the Greatest Name augurs well for its ability to further these collective undertakings.

The National Spiritual Assemblies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea as well as those of Cambodia, Colombia, India, Kenya, and Vanuatu, with the close support of the Office of Temples and Sites created at the Bahá'í World Centre in 2012, promptly moved forward with the initial preparations. A committee was formed in each country, entrusted with identifying, together with institutions and agencies at all levels of the community, means to promote widespread participation and to channel the enthusiasm engendered among the friends following the announcement of the projects. Another practical step in these national and local projects has been the selection of a suitable piece of land, one which is modest in size, strategically located, and easily accessible. Four of the seven properties are now in hand. A construction office for each project is being established to assist with the management of technical, financial, and legal issues. The work involved in the opening stage has advanced through generous contributions from the friends all over the world to the Temples Fund. Universal and sacrificial support for this Fund will ensure the steady progress of the next phases.

In four countries, the projects have reached the stage of preparing a design for the Temple edifice. This begins with the selection of potential architects and the formulation of an architectural brief defining the requirements for the structure, and it ultimately results in a contract for the final design. Architects are presented with the singular challenge of designing Temples “as perfect as is possible in the world of being” that harmonize naturally with the local culture and the daily lives of those who will gather to pray and meditate therein. The task calls for creativity and skill to combine beauty, grace, and dignity with modesty, functionality, and economy. A number of architects from near and far have gladly offered their services, and while such contributions are of course welcomed, National Assemblies are giving due regard to the value of engaging architects who are well acquainted with the area where the edifice will be built.

The erection of the continental House of Worship for South America is moving towards its completion in Chile. The steel-frame superstructure has been almost entirely installed, the placement of the interior translucent stone panels is under way, and the landscaping and the construction of auxiliary facilities are progressing according to schedule. The friends in Santiago, supported by others from throughout the Americas, have been diligently striving to prepare the surrounding population for the emergence of the House of Worship; increasing numbers are participating in the community-building endeavours, and a stream of visitors are being welcomed to the Temple site for prayer and discussion on the practical and spiritual dimensions of the enterprise. Measures are currently being put in place in that country in anticipation of the many demands that are sure to arise once the Temple is inaugurated in 2016.

As the friends worldwide rejoice in these heartening advances, their energies remain focused on the processes gaining strength in cluster after cluster. In this, they have not failed to appreciate the dynamic interaction between worship and endeavours to uplift the spiritual, social, and material conditions of society. May all those who are thus labouring in towns and cities, neighbourhoods and villages, derive insights from the exertions made to raise up the first two Houses of Worship at the turn of the twentieth century, in the East and then in the West.

In the city of ‘Ishqábád, a devoted band of believers who settled from Persia, and who, for a time, found peace and tranquillity in Turkistán, bent their energies towards the creation of a pattern of life that would reflect the exalted spiritual and social principles enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. In a span of a few decades, this group, originally consisting of a handful of families, was joined there by others and grew to a few thousand believers. This community, fortified by ties of camaraderie and animated by unity of purpose and a spirit of faithfulness, was enabled to reach a high degree of cohesiveness and development, for which it gained renown throughout the Bahá’í world. These friends, guided by their understanding of the divine Teachings, and within the bounds of the religious freedom they were accorded, toiled to create the conditions that would lead to the founding of a Mashriqu’l-Adhikár, that “crowning institution in every Bahá’í community”. On a befitting tract of land in the centre of the city that had been obtained some years before—with the consent of the Blessed Beauty Himself, facilities were built for communal well-being—a meeting hall, schools for children, a hostel for visitors, and a small clinic, among others. A sign of the notable achievements of the Bahá’ís in ‘Ishqábád, who in those productive years became distinguished for their prosperity, magnanimity, and intellectual and cultural attainments, was their attention to ensuring that all Bahá’í children and youth were literate in a society with rampant illiteracy, especially among girls. Within such an environment of unified endeavour and progress, and fostered at every stage of development by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a magnificent House of Worship emerged—the most prominent edifice in the area. For over twenty years, the friends experienced the heavenly joy of having realized their lofty aim: the establishment of a focal point of worship, a nerve centre of community life, a place where souls gathered at daybreak for humble invocation and communion before flowing out of its doors to engage in their daily pursuits. While the forces of irreligion eventually swept through the region and thwarted hopes, the brief appearance of a Mashriqu’l-Adhikár in ‘Ishqábád is an enduring testament to the volition and effort of a body of believers who established a rich pattern of life deriving its impetus from the power of the Creative Word.

In the Western Hemisphere, shortly after work commenced on the House of Worship in ‘Ishqábád, the members of the nascent Bahá’í community in North America were galvanized to demonstrate their faith and devotion by constructing a Temple of their own, and they wrote in 1903 to seek the Master’s consent. From that moment, the Mashriqu’l-Adhikár became inseparably intertwined with the fate of those dedicated servants of Bahá’u’lláh. While progress on this complex project was obstructed over decades by the effects of two world wars and a widespread economic depression, each stage in its development was intimately tied to the expansion of the community and the unfoldment of its administration. On the same day as the interment of the sacred remains of the Báb on Mount Carmel in March 1909, delegates gathered to establish the

Bahá'í Temple Unity, a national organization whose elected Board became the nucleus of the far-flung local communities of the continent. This development soon gave rise to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself laid the cornerstone of the building during His travels to North America, endowing the Mother Temple of the West with tremendous spiritual potentialities. And contributions for this historic enterprise flowed from Bahá'í centres in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific—a demonstration of the solidarity and sacrifice of the Bahá'ís of the East and West.

As the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land centre their thoughts on God and occupy themselves each day with His remembrance, ceaselessly exerting effort in His Name, let them draw inspiration from these stirring words addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a believer who was devoted to building the first House of Worship, raised under His close and loving direction:

Hasten now to 'Ishqábád, in the utmost detachment and aflame with the fire of attraction, and convey to the friends of God ardent greetings from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Kiss thou each one's face and express this servant's deep and sincere affection to all. Do thou on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Bahá move the earth, carry the mortar, and haul the stones for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár so that the rapture of this service may bring joy and gladness to the Centre of Servitude. That Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord. Therefore, it is this servant's hope that each and every virtuous and righteous soul will sacrifice his all, evince great happiness and exultation, and rejoice in carrying the earth and mortar so that this Divine Edifice may be raised, the Cause of God may spread, and in every corner of the world the friends may arise with the utmost resolve to accomplish this great task. Were 'Abdu'l-Bahá not imprisoned and were there not obstacles in his path, he himself would assuredly hasten to 'Ishqábád and carry the earth for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár with the utmost joy and gladness. It behoveth the friends now to arise with this intention in mind and serve in my place so that in a short time this Edifice may be revealed to all eyes, the loved ones of God may engage in making mention of the Abhá Beauty, the melodies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár may rise at dawning to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm. Thus will the hearts rejoice, the souls delight in joyful tidings, and the minds be illumined. This is the highest hope of the sincere ones; this is the dearest wish of them that are nigh unto God.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]