THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2015

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The resplendent season of Riḍván is at hand, and from the heights to which the community of the Greatest Name has attained, bright prospects are visible on the horizon. A vast terrain has been traversed: new programmes of growth have appeared, and while hundreds more must still emerge in the next twelve months, efforts to set in motion the necessary pattern of activity have already begun in almost every one of the clusters required to reach the 5,000 called for in the Five Year Plan. Existing programmes are gaining in strength, many showing more clearly what it means for the Cause of God to extend further into the social landscape across a cluster and within a neighbourhood or village. The paths that lead to sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation are being followed with firmer footsteps, valiant youth often setting the pace. Ways in which the society-building power of the Faith can find release in various settings are becoming more apparent, and those defining features that must come to mark the further unfoldment of the growth process in a cluster are becoming gradually discernible.

The call to carry out and support this work is directed to every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, and it will evoke a response in every heart that aches at the wretched condition of the world, the lamentable circumstances from which so many people are unable to gain relief. For, ultimately, it is systematic, determined, and selfless action undertaken within the wide embrace of the Plan's framework that is the most constructive response of every concerned believer to the multiplying ills of a disordered society. Over the last year, it has become clearer still that, in different nations in different ways, the social consensus around ideals that have traditionally united and bound together a people is increasingly worn and spent. It can no longer offer a reliable defence against a variety of self-serving, intolerant, and toxic ideologies that feed upon discontent and resentment. With a conflicted world appearing every day less sure of itself, the proponents of these destructive doctrines grow bold and brazen. We recall the unequivocal verdict from the Supreme Pen: "They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light." Well-meaning leaders of nations and people of goodwill are left struggling to repair the fractures evident in society and powerless to prevent their spread. The effects of all this are not only to be seen in outright conflict or a collapse in order. In the distrust that pits neighbour against neighbour and severs family ties, in the antagonism of so much of what passes for social discourse, in the casualness with which appeals to ignoble human motivations are used to win power and pile up riches—in all these lie unmistakable signs that the moral force which sustains society has become gravely depleted.

Yet there is reassurance in the knowledge that, amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life is taking shape which gives practical expression to all that is heavenly in human beings. We have observed how, especially in those places where intensity in teaching and community-building activities has been maintained, the friends have been able to guard themselves against the forces of materialism that risk sapping their precious energies. Not only that, but in managing the various other calls upon their time, they never lose sight of the sacred and pressing tasks before them. Such attentiveness to the needs of the Faith and to humanity's best interests is required in every community. Where a programme of growth has been established in a previously unopened cluster, we see how the initial stirrings of activity arise out of the love for Bahá'u'lláh held in the heart of a committed believer. Notwithstanding the orders of complexity that must eventually be accommodated as a community grows in size, all activity begins with this simple strand of love. It is the vital thread from which is woven a pattern of patient and concentrated effort, cycle after cycle, to introduce children, youth, and adults to spiritual ideas; to foster a feeling for worship through gatherings for prayer and devotion; to

stimulate conversations that illuminate understanding; to start ever-growing numbers on a lifetime of study of the Creative Word and its translation into deeds; to develop, along with others, capacity for service; and to accompany one another in the exercise of what has been learned. Beloved friends, loved ones of the Abhá Beauty: We pray for you in earnest on every occasion we present ourselves at His Holy Threshold, that your love for Him may give you the strength to consecrate your lives to His Cause.

The rich insights arising from clusters, and from centres of intense activity within them, where the dynamics of community life have embraced large numbers of people deserve special mention. We are gratified to see how a culture of mutual support, founded on fellowship and humble service, has quite naturally established itself in such quarters, enabling more and more souls to be systematically brought within the pale of the community's activities. Indeed, in an increasing number of settings the movement of a population towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a new society appears no longer merely as an enthralling prospect but as an emerging reality.

We wish to address some additional words to those of you in whose surroundings marked progress is yet to occur and who long for change. Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes? Do not imagine that your own case is inherently any different. Change in a cluster, be it swift or hard won, flows neither from a formulaic approach nor from random activity; it proceeds to the rhythm of action, reflection, and consultation, and is propelled by plans that are the fruit of experience. Beyond this, and whatever its immediate effects, service to the Beloved is, in itself, a source of abiding joy to the spirit. Take heart, too, from the example of your spiritual kin in the Cradle of the Faith, how their constructive outlook, their resilience as a community, and their steadfastness in promoting the Divine Word are bringing about change in their society at the level of thought and deed. God is with you, with each of you. In the twelve months that remain of the Plan, let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one.

The all-important work of expansion and consolidation lays a solid foundation for the endeavours the Bahá'í world is being called to undertake in numerous other spheres. At the Bahá'í World Centre, efforts are intensifying to methodically catalogue and index the content of the thousands of Tablets which constitute that infinitely precious bequest, the Holy Texts of our Faith, held in trust for the benefit of all humankind—this, so as to accelerate the publication of volumes of the Writings, both in their original languages and in English translation. Endeavours to establish eight Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, sacred Fanes raised up to the glory of God, continue apace. External affairs work at the national level has gained markedly in effectiveness and become increasingly systematic, further stimulated by the release of a document, sent to National Spiritual Assemblies six months ago, which draws on the considerable experience generated over the last two decades and provides an expanded framework for developing these endeavours in the future. Meanwhile, two new Offices of the Bahá'í International Community, sisters to its United Nations Office based in New York and Geneva and to its Office in Brussels, have been opened in Addis Ababa and Jakarta, broadening the opportunities for the perspectives of the Cause to be offered at the international level in Africa and Southeast Asia. Often prompted by the demands of growth, a range of National Assemblies are building up their administrative capacity, visible in their thoughtful stewardship of the resources available to them, their efforts to become intimately familiar with the conditions of their communities, and their vigilance in ensuring that the operations of their National Offices grow ever stronger; the need to systematize the impressive body of knowledge now accumulating in this area has led to the creation at the World Centre of the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems. Initiatives for social action of various kinds continue to multiply in many countries, enabling much to be learned about how the wisdom enshrined in the Teachings can be applied to improve social and economic circumstances; so

promising is this field that we have established a seven-member International Advisory Board to the Office of Social and Economic Development, introducing the next stage in the evolution of that Office. Three members of the Board will also serve as the Office's coordinating team and be resident in the Holy Land.

At this Riḍván, then, while we see much to be done, we see many ready to do it. In thousands of clusters, neighbourhoods, and villages, fresh springs of faith and assurance are pouring forth, cheering the spirits of those touched by their reviving waters. In places, the flow is a steady stream, in some, already a river. Now is not the moment for any soul to linger upon the bank—let all lend themselves to the onward surge.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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