THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

26 March 2016

To the Bahá'ís of the World acting under the Mandate of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Dearly loved Friends,

Today at dawn, on your behalf, the members of the Universal House of Justice gathered with the members of the International Teaching Centre in the Master's room at the house in Bahjí to commemorate that pivotal moment when the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan was revealed by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Prayers from those wondrous Tablets were offered in thanksgiving for the glorious achievements of the past. Divine assistance was sought in support of the labours required in the forthcoming stage of the Plan's unfoldment. And heavenly bounties were implored to ensure still greater victories in meeting the challenges of future stages, one after another, reaching as far as the fringes of the Golden Age.

The Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Bahá'ís of North America between 26 March 1916 and 8 March 1917, constitutes one of the mighty Charters of His Father's Faith. Set forth in those fourteen Tablets, Shoghi Effendi explains, is "the mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name." It is "impelled by forces beyond our power to predict or appraise" and "claims as the theatre for its operation territories spread over five continents and the islands of the seven seas." Within it are held "the seeds of the world's spiritual revival and ultimate redemption."

In the Tablets of the Divine Plan 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only provided the broad vision necessary to carry out the responsibilities entrusted by Bahá'u'lláh to His loved ones, but He also outlined spiritual concepts and practical strategies necessary for success. In His exhortations to teach and to travel to teach; to arise personally or deputize others; to move to all parts of the world and open countries and territories, each meticulously named; to learn the relevant languages and translate and disseminate the Sacred Texts; to train the teachers of the Faith and especially youth; to teach the masses and, particularly, indigenous peoples; to be firm in the Covenant and protect the Faith; and to sow seeds and cultivate them in a process of organic growth, we find hallmarks of the entire series of Plans—each a specific stage of the Divine Plan shaped by the Head of the Faith—that will continue to unfold throughout the Formative Age.

The initial response to the Tablets of the Divine Plan was limited to the noble exploits of a few who, like the immortal Martha Root, arose independently. It was Shoghi Effendi who assisted the Bahá'ís of the world to gradually grasp the significance of this Charter and learn to approach its requirements in a systematic manner. The Plan was held in abeyance for nearly twenty years while the Administrative Order took shape, after which communities were patiently guided to conduct national plans, including the two Seven Year Plans in North America that constituted the first stages of the Divine Plan, until finally, in 1953, all could unite in the first global Plan, the Ten Year Crusade. Shoghi Effendi looked beyond that crucial decade to "the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs" of the Formative Age, "by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies." The Divine Plan continues at the present time with the intensive effort to establish a pattern of community life that can embrace thousands upon thousands in clusters that cover the face of the planet. Let every Bahá'í appreciate, more deeply than ever before, that the provisions of the next stage of the Divine Plan set forth in our recent message to the Counsellors' Conference comprise the challenging requirements of the present hour—requirements both urgent and sacred, which, when sacrificially and persistently addressed, may hasten "the advent of that Golden Age which must witness the proclamation of the Most Great

Peace and the unfoldment of that world civilization which is the offspring and primary purpose of that Peace."

How is it possible to adequately convey our feelings of irrepressible love and unbounded admiration as we reflect on the exploits of the members of your communities, past and present, in pursuit of your sacred mission? The vision that unfolds before our eyes is of a grassroots stirring, an organic flowering, a resistless movement that has grown imperceptibly at times and at others in great surges to eventually embrace the entire world: God-intoxicated lovers exceeding their personal capacities, embryonic institutions learning to exercise their powers for the well-being of humanity, communities emerging as shelters and schools in which human potential is nourished. We pay homage to the humblest ministrations and ceaseless endeavours of the Faith's devoted rank and file, as well as to the extraordinary accomplishments of its heroes, knights, and martyrs. On vast continents and scattered islands, from arctic regions to desert climes, atop mountain plateaus and across lowland plains, in crowded urban quarters and villages along rivers and jungle paths, you and your spiritual forebears brought the message of the Blessed Beauty to peoples and nations. You sacrificed rest and comfort and left your homes to journey to unfamiliar lands or homefront outposts. You set aside your own interests for the common good. Whatever your means, you sacrificially contributed your share of resources. You taught the Faith to multitudes, to groups in various settings, and to individuals in your homes. You quickened souls and helped them on their own paths of service, disseminated widely the Bahá'í writings and participated in deep study of the teachings, strove for excellence in all fields, engaged diverse peoples of all strata in conversations pertaining to the search for solutions to humanity's ills, and initiated efforts for economic and social development. Though misunderstandings and problems sometimes arose, you forgave one another and marched together in serried lines. You raised the framework of the Administrative Order and clung steadfastly to the Covenant, protecting the Faith from every blow directed against it. In your ardour for the Beloved, you endured prejudice and estrangement, privation and loneliness, persecution and imprisonment. You welcomed and nurtured generations of children and youth upon whom the vitality of the Faith and future of humanity depend, and as tested veterans, you heeded the Master's admonition to serve until your last breath. You have written the story of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan on the scroll of its first century. Before you, beloved friends, lies stretched out the blank scroll of the future on which you and your spiritual descendants will inscribe fresh and lasting deeds of renunciation and heroism for the betterment of the world.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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