

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2020

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Two emerging realities have prompted us to address these words to you. The first reality is the growing consciousness around the world of the looming and appalling dangers carried by the coronavirus pandemic. In many countries, despite valiant and determined collective efforts to avert disaster, the situation is already grave, creating tragedies for families and individuals and plunging whole societies into crisis. Waves of suffering and sorrow are breaking over one place after another, and will weaken different nations, at different moments, in different ways.

The second reality, one that is daily more apparent, is the resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world in the face of a challenge which has no likeness in living memory. Your response has been outstanding. When we wrote to you a month ago at Naw-Rúz, we were keen to stress the impressive qualities being demonstrated by communities whose normal pattern of activity had been disrupted. All that has transpired in the intervening weeks, during which many friends have had to comply with increasingly stringent restrictions, has only deepened our feelings of admiration. Learning from the experience gained in other parts of the world, some communities have found safe and creative ways to raise awareness of public health requirements within populations. Special attention is being paid to those who are most at risk from the virus and the economic hardship arising from its spread; the initiatives featured on the Bahá'í World News Service in this regard are but a mere handful of the countless number under way. These are being complemented by efforts to examine, promote, and cultivate those spiritual qualities which are most needed at this time. Many such efforts are necessarily taking place in family units or in solitude, but where conditions allow or communication tools make it possible, a sense of extraordinary solidarity is being actively nurtured among souls sharing similar circumstances. The dynamics of community life, so important for collective progress, will not be subdued.

Our spirits have been lifted by seeing how capably National Spiritual Assemblies, the unflagging generals of the Army of Light, have guided their communities and shaped their response to the crisis. They have been strongly supported by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries who, as always, have heroically raised aloft the standard of loving service. While staying well informed about the often rapidly changing conditions in their countries, Assemblies have made the necessary arrangements for administering the affairs of the Cause, and in particular for conducting elections, where these remain feasible. Through regular communications, institutions and agencies have offered wise counsel, comforting reassurance, and constant encouragement. In many instances, they have also started to identify constructive themes that are emerging from the discourses opening up in their societies. The expectation we expressed in our Naw-Rúz message that this test of humanity's endurance would grant it greater insight is already being realized. Leaders, prominent thinkers, and commentators have begun to explore fundamental concepts and bold aspirations that, in recent times, have been largely absent from public discourse. At present these are but early glimmerings, yet they hold out the possibility that a moment of collective consciousness may be in view.

The comfort we take at seeing the resilience of the Bahá'í world manifest itself in action is tempered by our sadness at the consequences of the pandemic for humanity. Alas, we are conscious that the believers and their associates also share in this suffering. The distance from friends and relations that, owing to the requirements of public safety, so many people in the world are now maintaining will, for some, give way to permanent separation. At each dawn it seems certain that more agonies will be endured before the set of sun. May the promise of reunion in the

eternal realms offer solace to those who lose loved ones. We pray for the relief of their hearts, and for the grace of God to surround those whose education, livelihoods, homes, or even their very means of sustenance are being put at risk. For you, and for those you cherish, and for all your compatriots, we supplicate Bahá'u'lláh and beseech His blessings and favour.

However long and arduous the road that must be travelled, we are supremely confident in your fortitude and your determination to see the journey through. You draw from stores of hope, faith, and magnanimity, putting the needs of others before your own, enabling those who are deprived to be spiritually nourished, those who increasingly thirst for answers to be satisfied, and those who long to work for the betterment of the world to be offered the means. From the devoted followers of the Blessed Perfection, how could we expect less?

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]