

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

31 December 2025

To the Conference of the
Continental Boards of Counsellors

Dearly loved Friends,

The first phase of the Nine Year Plan has cast a light on the Bahá'í community's considerable strengths. The unprecedented energy and determination with which the Plan was launched, at over 10,000 gatherings of Bahá'ís and interested friends, quickly raised awareness of its objectives and special character. Swift action followed. We anticipate that by Ridván there will be a cluster where the third milestone has been passed in around half of the 160 countries and regions where, at the start of the Plan, still no such cluster existed—a dramatic accomplishment. Valuable experience has been gained as a result, not least through the dedicated efforts of an impressive number of individuals who arose as part of a coordinated strategy of pioneering. At the same time, particular attention has been directed in all countries towards third milestone clusters, and consequently, the frontiers of learning have advanced considerably and the society-building power of the Faith is becoming more apparent. Many of these clusters are acting as reservoirs of knowledge and resources to the clusters that surround them, and this is proving vital to the process of growth everywhere. Indeed, the rapid movement of clusters past the first, second, and third milestones requires that this pattern be strengthened and widely replicated. For, gratified as we are by the progress made, it is evident that a most formidable task lies ahead if each national Bahá'í community is to fulfil the aspirations for the movement of clusters that it set for itself when the Plan began. There is an urgent need to cultivate more broadly the capacities that are required to intensify a programme of growth. The primary point of reference for this work—and for all the work of the Nine Year Plan—will, of course, continue to be our 30 December 2021 message, but within these few pages, we will seek to present a number of insights that have emerged from the efforts of communities, institutions, and individuals as they have put the Plan into effect.

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In clusters and in neighbourhoods and villages where notable progress has occurred, no matter from what starting point, an essential factor has been the capacity of the friends at the grassroots to learn together, combining insights gained from their own experience with those of advanced communities nearby or further afield, without any sense of applying a fixed formula. Although the fundamental features of a programme of growth—its aim, its guiding principles, and its basic instruments—are the same everywhere, growth is an organic process, not a mechanical one. In such a process, progress depends at each point on maintaining a clear understanding of the priorities that pertain to a place and, as we emphasized in our message to your 2021 conference, reading evolving realities and adopting approaches suited to local conditions.

The third milestone is a measurement of a journey whose beginnings are well understood. Once it is passed, clusters where progress has been consolidated can be seen to share important features. The institute's programmes are being supported by a relatively substantial and expanding pool of human resources. Effort is being made to enable more neighbourhoods and villages to sustain intense activity. There is a capacity to embrace large numbers and manage increasing complexity through both formal and informal arrangements. Crucially, in these clusters, consistent attention is being given to sustaining effective cycles, so that there is a regular pulse of study, consultation, action, and reflection through which the community enhances its capacity to

grow and to contribute to the advancement of the society to which it belongs. These cycles include periods of particular intensity, an injection of energy that is propelling the engagement of the widest possible circle of friends. Community undertakings such as family festivals, junior youth camps, service projects, arts endeavours, and collective teaching initiatives are proceeding according to their own respective rhythms. Reflection spaces bring together many friends, and the use of such spaces is thoughtful and deliberate—there is awareness that the quality and utility of reflection is measured by the purposeful action arising from it. From these clusters, resources flow to surrounding clusters to help the friends there make accelerated progress.

We have observed with particular interest how a pronounced community spirit can increasingly be felt among all those involved in the pattern of activity in third milestone clusters, even when it is not very strong in the wider society. It is often expressed as a feeling of belonging and a sense of common endeavour and mutual support. This and other advances at the level of culture are becoming especially evident in the cluster's centres of intense activity—not only where participation can be measured as a significant proportion of the population, but in any neighbourhood or village where large numbers are attracted to the programmes and activities of the community. There is a rise, too, in various collaborative arrangements, which are doing much to build or reshape a shared social identity and collective purpose. These arrangements include the groups of families and households we mentioned in 2021 and also other natural groupings such as women or youth, farmers or educators, and animators or children's class teachers, often with a supportive network of friends. Groups of this kind set about organizing their own efforts to improve some aspect of the life of the community, and they promote broader participation in those efforts. In other words, they are helping the growth and development of the community to become self-perpetuating, and they are doing so without the need for new layers of administrative structure. This is consequential. It demonstrates the emerging capacity of the community to be a visible protagonist in the Plan. Buttressed by the full confidence and loving guidance of the institutions, the community is steering the trajectory of its own development with creativity and ingenuity, and exploring how the principles contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation can be applied to the issues that confront it within its immediate reality.

It is no surprise that the community-based initiatives we described to you in 2021 often proceed from the collaborative arrangements mentioned above. These modest but sustained initiatives of social action represent an area of endeavour which, of course, has been implicit in a programme of growth from the beginning; even in the earliest institute courses, capacity is built for actions that contribute to the betterment of the world and for meaningful conversations on matters of social significance. In the last four years, the number of community-based initiatives emerging out of the activities of the Plan has increased considerably. Some have also come about as the result of the encouragement, training, and assistance of a Bahá'í-inspired organization. All these initiatives are more likely to arise in places where the community-building process has advanced notably, and we appreciate the support that you and your auxiliaries, as well as Local Spiritual Assemblies, have given to such initiatives. The conditions that enable these to appear and flourish in different settings around the world are being actively explored by the Bahá'í International Development Organization, including how, in time, some of these initiatives develop into community-based organizations.

At the heart of a community's progress, of course, is the institute process. So long as the capacity to work with large numbers in a cluster is still being built, it is natural for the efforts of the institute to be focused almost exclusively on raising up human resources that can carry out specific acts of service. But over time, after the third milestone has been passed and particular centres of intense activity have gained strength, the institute will also devote more serious thought to the systematic and effective delivery of the programmes it offers from childhood to adulthood, and the propagation of these programmes in other parts of the cluster. Classes for children in all the grades begin to be introduced, the number of texts being studied by junior youth groups increases, and participation in both programmes is sustained year-on-year, all of which

gives these undertakings a higher degree of formalization. Often, these advances are relying on the service rendered by a growing cohort of youth. The institute's efforts are gradually being complemented by additional educational endeavours for the development of a population, such as programmes utilizing Bahá'í-inspired materials, as well as courses available in the wider society, or even, in some places, a community school. In our 30 December 2021 message, we expressed the hope that attention would be given to helping young people access educational opportunities, and we have been pleased to see this need being met in a variety of ways, including after-school tutoring and assistance for youth wishing to enter higher education. As a broad educational path begins to take shape, a community feels a greater responsibility to stimulate and encourage each of its members, especially the young, to advance along it in pursuit of spiritual and intellectual growth.

We have noted the benefits that come from raising awareness in the wider society of the educational value of the institute's programmes. This has involved efforts to reach out to the parents and relatives of children and junior youth, and also to officials and senior educators with whom Bahá'ís are interacting. Such efforts are broadening the support given to institute activities by the wider society, including by public institutions and agencies as well as traditional leaders. Indeed, in clusters where the Bahá'í community's endeavours have achieved a significant level of visibility and respect, it is not unusual for figures in authority in local government, public services, and civil society to reach out for insight and collaboration. The believers and the Local Spiritual Assemblies that represent them are open to working alongside the institutions of society and welcome such contact, while remaining vigilant to avoid becoming entangled in politics. At times, we have seen how the friends' relationship with the organs of local government expands beyond collaboration to embrace a sense of shared mission, focused on the advancement of society—a people moving as one. In more and more places, the generality of the inhabitants are coming to regard the Local Assembly as being theirs as well, and they see the light that shines from it.

In 2021 we highlighted the possibilities that can be realized when Bahá'í activity becomes prevalent in a place, and although the settings where this has occurred remain relatively modest in number, they are a steadily growing phenomenon. These are specific places within a cluster where the society-building power of the Faith is at its most visible. Here, the workings of the Plan are becoming embedded in the everyday life of a people in ways that cannot be easily measured or described in their totality. In their collective efforts and deliberations, the friends in such locations are increasingly occupied with cultivating spaces in which people consult and share knowledge, derived from both science and religion, and find ways to apply that knowledge to family development, education, economic activity, public health, and other fundamental processes of community life, infusing them with a fresh spirit. Given the far-reaching implications of what is occurring, the term “programme of growth” no longer does full justice to such developments. Although in other parts of the cluster growth might still be at an early stage, here, where the level of participation in Bahá'í activities is so high, a new reality is coming into view as the Bahá'í community's relationship with society evolves. Bright horizons beckon.

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In the natural environment, combinations and connections create vibrancy and new life; likewise, a flourishing process of learning arises from countless formal and informal interactions and their emergent properties. This process is characterized by a free-flowing, uninterrupted exchange of insights, experience, and ideas among the friends at the grassroots. But it does not end there—it continues to unfold at the regional and national levels and beyond, and learning at each level is fostered by the dynamic discussions that take place in spaces created for reflection on action. These discussions draw on lessons arising from the efforts of the global Bahá'í community within the Plan's framework as well as conclusions derived from the analysis of patterns

emerging locally. Of course, these discussions are also shaped by the institutions and agencies serving at each level. For while individuals, communities, and institutions all have a contribution to make, it is the institutions of the Faith that are ultimately charged with tending to this entire ecosystem of learning. An essential requirement is to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place, both institutional and less formal, to enable it to thrive, and that all those involved in the learning process are connected by loving relationships imbued with a spirit of humility and magnanimity.

The capacity of institutions and agencies to foster a process of learning is closely connected with their capacity to administer the work effectively and efficiently. As the various lines of action in a locality multiply and interact, Local Assemblies have increasingly been able to meet the need for coordination and planning. The Assemblies often share this responsibility with cluster agencies, and together they ensure that advice, resources, and encouragement are being directed to where they are most needed and that the process of learning continues to advance. The cluster agencies in particular see to it that lessons learned in one locality, or even in a small portion of it, benefit the rest of the cluster. Meanwhile, the approach to sharing knowledge and insights within a cluster is being mirrored by the approach to sharing knowledge and insights among clusters. The swift provision of support and exchange of experience has become possible through the development of arrangements within groups of adjoining clusters. With Regional Bahá'í Councils or a National Growth Committee now established in every country, the institutional means are in place everywhere for the process of growth to be systematically advanced. And at the national level, when the richness of what is occurring demands it, National Assemblies have developed certain structures and spaces to help them keep abreast of what is being learned. Naturally, a new feature would not be introduced unless the needs of growth demand it; nevertheless, we look to you and your auxiliaries to be alert to when existing arrangements at any level of the community need to evolve to meet the requirements of growth, and then, in your interactions with relevant institutions, to encourage the emergence of new arrangements in a suitable form.

We have also noted how the administrative arrangements that support the work of the training institute are evolving in a way that nurtures a process of learning about the accelerated spread of the institute's programmes, delivered with the requisite quality. In the early stages, these arrangements are quite simple, but as the number of those in a cluster serving as tutors, animators, and children's class teachers grows, the need for them to engage meaningfully in a collective learning process becomes more pressing. It is vital that they be able to maintain an ongoing conversation with one another, to reflect together in groups, and to support each other in action. These patterns of interaction develop more easily when the friends involved are accompanied effectively by coordinators and the collaborators who assist them. Of course, coordinators themselves also need to be raised up in each cluster and helped to develop their capacity over time, and this is generally the responsibility of regional or national institute coordinators, whose own endeavours, in turn, are increasingly being reinforced by teams of friends for each educational programme. In the last four years, these teams have done much to assist the regional and national coordinators to organize seminars that explore the content of a programme in depth, enabling the institute's materials to be delivered to larger numbers with ever-greater creativity, flexibility, and agility—but without compromising a programme's essential components.

All the while, the experience and insights emerging from what an institute is learning are being collected, analysed, and shared. This work is benefiting greatly from gatherings for consultation, periodically convened by the institute, that bring together Auxiliary Board members, representatives of the Regional Bahá'í Council or National Growth Committee, resource persons from the learning site, and other individuals whose experience has become a valued asset. The meetings of this collaborative group help to strengthen the institute's connections with other institutions and agencies, ensuring that its learning process unfolds within the broader context of learning about the overall process of growth. The institute board is also fostering the strength of

all other aspects of the institute, including its administrative capacity, so that it can sustain a progressively more complex system of spiritual education. And almost all institutes have now been organized into groupings to facilitate the flow of both practical support and valuable insights; the development of these networks has proven to be an important strategy for institutes to advance rapidly.

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It has consistently brought us joy to see the enkindled souls described in our message to your 2021 conference, in cluster after cluster and in greater and greater numbers, pursuing the Plan with whole-hearted devotion and, critically, a dedication to the process of learning. This is the surest foundation for the progress that needs to be made in the Plan's second phase.

The processes unfolding in the Plan are of course exerting a profound, transformative impact on the individual. What we observe is eager friends learning how to more closely align their pursuits with the Will of God. Through engagement with the Plan's framework for action, individuals are discovering ways to improve life—in all its aspects—for themselves, for their children, for their wider family, and for their community. There is a heightened spiritual consciousness that leads to a life of purpose and meaning, a life dedicated to developing their God-given potentialities and labouring for the transformation of society. They recognize the value of knowledge in propelling progress, are committed to its generation, and share it freely and humbly. Learning is a habit of mind for them, an orientation in all they do. In every face they see a fellow seeker after truth. They wholly devote themselves to the spiritual, intellectual, and material advancement of a population. They are not swept off course by the world's unabating distractions. Steady do they go, patient and perseverant, pledged to long-term endeavour. And in the company of many others, they are building havens of peace.

It has been seen again and again that as individuals become more conscious of the significance of an expansive pattern of activity in their surroundings, they readily volunteer time and creative energy to develop it further. More generally, believers also help their community by contributing to the Fund and offering other types of material resources. While all believers make contributions of this kind, for some believers of means, this is a way of advancing the Plan that they are especially well positioned to utilize. Whatever form a person's service takes, it emerges from the unique interaction between, on the one hand, the needs of the Faith and, on the other, the possibilities afforded by the circumstances of each individual and the sacrifices that he or she chooses to make.

And the believers increasingly appreciate the privilege of being able to acquaint a soul with the mission of Bahá'u'lláh—and, beyond this, to lovingly help a soul who stands at the doors of the Faith to step within. In 2021 we drew attention to this infinitely precious moment in a spiritual journey. We have noted with interest that, since then, the friends in many places have focused attention on how to recognize when the city of the heart is open, and on the conversations that lead to this moment and that follow it. Much remains to be learned in this regard, both about how to discern receptivity in different settings and how to acknowledge when it has already matured into faith.

Looking back over one's life, there can be no greater joy and comfort than to know that it was spent in acute awareness of the divine remedy, that no effort was spared to proffer that remedy to receptive souls, and that during those fleeting years when opportunity was at hand, even in the midst of difficulties, every chance was seized to respond to humanity's intense need. With ardour and longing we beseech Bahá'u'lláh, every time we present ourselves at His Threshold, for the success of all the friends.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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