

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 151

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

One year of the Three Year Plan is now behind us, a year in which the turmoil of the world engendered in hearts and minds both hope and fear, both optimism and despair, both admiration of people's courage and shame at the cruelty to which mankind can sink. Amidst these trials, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh press forward, clear-visioned and confident, raising the structure of God's Kingdom, suffusing society with a new spirit, and demonstrating to all people the revitalizing effect of the divine Teachings.

At the World Center, the 23rd of May saw the opening of a new five-year term of the membership of the International Teaching Centre. In our first joint meeting we applauded the many initiatives which it had pursued during the previous term and urged their further development. Prominent among these initiatives was the guidance given to the Continental Counselors to promote consultation at local and national levels, among institutions and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth in the Bahá'í community. Another was the progressive clarifying of various approaches to the teaching work. As the year has proceeded, these actions have intensified the impetus being given to the development of the Faith and its institutions by the Counselors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, reinforcing the insight and encouragement that they give to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and the individual believers.

The growing reputation of the Faith in the eyes of the world, and the attention that this is drawing to the World Center, underscore the importance of completing the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the buildings for the World Administrative Center of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Since the issuing of the special appeal to the Bahá'í world to raise seventy-four million dollars for this project during the course of the Three Year Plan, the response has been heartwarming, and it is our ardent hope that the continuation of this spirit of sacrifice will result in the speedy achievement of this goal and will ensure the uninterrupted progress of the work, drawing to God's Holy Mountain the admiring gaze of visitors and residents alike.

Study of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is illuminating the lives of the rank and file of the believers. Awareness of the importance of upholding the principles of the Faith and obeying its laws is rising. Universal application of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has aroused an enthusiastic response. The friends' consciousness of their individual obligation to teach the Faith is growing. As they discharge their spiritual responsibilities and learn greater dependence on the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, they find that their faith gains new vitality, and their hearts fresh confidence. These are all areas where the action of the individual need not wait for either urging or help. Alone, and aided solely by the power of the Almighty, each believer is challenged to develop these spiritual strengths which will contribute beyond measure to the evolution of the community.

The human resources of the Cause are being augmented in two ways. People of capacity are being moved to embrace the Faith, reinforcing the ranks of those who are already serving. The latter, for their part, have been enriching their experience and acquiring greater capabilities through a more profound study of the Teachings and through expressing them in action. Recognizing the need for a more systematic deepening of their understanding of the Teachings and their application to society, the friends have increased the use of workshops and institutes, with notable success. In the year ahead these two complementary processes—attracting people of

capacity and increasing our own abilities—must be further advanced, stimulating individual action and the harmonious development of a wide range of activities for the promotion of the Faith.

As the potentialities of the individual believers unfold, so the local and national Bahá'í institutions are gaining ability to foster the quality of the life of their communities and to conceive and implement imaginative programs. In many areas Local Spiritual Assemblies have collaborated in teaching the Faith in a region. National Assemblies, likewise, have been evolving innovative projects to seize the opportunities presented by developments outside the Cause. Some examples of such activities, in very different fields, have been the Open Letter Project in Albania; the response to the extraordinary receptivity of the authorities and the general population in the Sakha and Buryat Republics in Siberia; and the agreement signed between the National Spiritual Assembly of the Marshall Islands and the local government of Majuro Atoll in response to the national authorities' request that the Bahá'ís assume responsibility for the operation of five state elementary schools.

The evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions has made possible an increased measure of decentralization in the administration of the work. For this beneficial process to expand, however, the crucial prerequisite in most countries is the speedy improvement of the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies. This calls for the close attention of every believer. These local Bahá'í institutions, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, constitute a reservoir of strength and guidance which will amplify the effectiveness of the work of the Cause as they mature.

We live in the midst of populations which are in desperate need of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. It is our duty to present it lucidly and convincingly to as many souls as possible. The darkness and suffering around us not only are the signs of a need, but also present us with an opportunity which we must not fail to use. Conveying the message is merely the first step. We must then ensure that it is understood and applied, for, as we read in one of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian: "Until the public sees in the Bahá'í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers." When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings, develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens to gradually produce a truly Bahá'í community, a light and haven for the bewildered.

After the glorious events of the Heroic Age of the Faith, entry by troops of the peoples of the world into the Cause of God first occurred in Africa during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, and then spread to other areas. Gradually, the Bahá'í communities of those regions are learning through experience and are evolving methods and programs which aim to draw these large numbers of believers together in functioning communities and to establish strong bases for continuing growth. To assist them in their endeavors, to help the Bahá'ís in other countries to initiate and maintain this process, and to dispel the misconceptions which inevitably surround so challenging a concept, a compilation on *Promoting Entry by Troops* has been issued. Study and application of the principles and approaches described therein will undoubtedly assist every Bahá'í teacher and community, whether in an area where entry by troops has been a reality for many years, or in one where no sign of it has yet appeared. In respect to the latter, it will help to convince individual believers of the reality and validity of this process and will enable Bahá'í communities to prepare themselves spiritually and materially for this surge forward, to eagerly anticipate its occurrence, to take those steps which will foster its beginning, and to ensure the measures which will perpetuate its growth.

The notable rise in international collaboration during the past year, the settlement of pioneers, and the flow of traveling teachers have knit ever more closely the fabric of the Bahá'í community. Leading the way in such achievements, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum undertook an arduous journey for the encouragement of the believers and the proclamation of the Faith, covering Russia and other lands which were formerly parts of the Soviet Union, from the Baltic

States in the west to Siberia in the east, from the Central Asian republics in the south to Saint Petersburg and Yakutsk in the north.

This Riḍván seven inaugural National Conventions will be held. Our representatives at these historic events will be the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mongolia in Ulaan Baatar; the Hand of the Cause 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá for the election of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Slovenia and Croatia in Ljubljana; Counselor Laretta King for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kazakhstan in Alma-Ata, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek; and Counselor Shapoor Monadjem for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The present Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia, with its seat in 'Ishqábád, will then become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Turkmenistan.

The end of the century is fast approaching. There is so little time and so much to do. We call upon every follower of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to consecrate the utmost endeavor to the two primary tasks of teaching the Faith to every thirsting soul, and of providing the material means for the completion of the monumental projects being pursued on Mount Carmel. Whatever the outward conditions of mankind in the year ahead, the Bahá'í community must gather strength, demonstrate more clearly the distinguishing character of its way of life, reach out with confidence to proclaim and teach its message, and draw down in ever-greater measure the confirming assistance of the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse. In every aspect of this work, it is the individual Bahá'í who holds the key to victory.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]