

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Naw-Rúz 177

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We feel compelled by current events to write to you at this time and not wait until Ridván. As you will be all too aware, over recent weeks and months, an apprehensive world has been coming to terms with a rapidly evolving health crisis affecting the people in many countries, the consequences of which for society cannot yet be estimated with any certainty. We are sure that you, like us, have felt great concern for the well-being of humanity, especially for those who are most vulnerable. Seldom has it been more evident that society's collective strength is dependent on the unity it can manifest in action, from the international stage to the grassroots, and we know that you are giving your support to the essential efforts being made in this regard to protect the health and welfare of all.

Inevitably, the current situation will have an impact on the administration of the Cause of God in many places, and in every case the relevant National Spiritual Assembly will advise on the appropriate measures to be taken. In some countries this will include cancelling National Convention, with arrangements being made for the National Assembly to be elected by other means. Similar arrangements might also need to be made, in certain places, for the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies. However, in circumstances where even this proves unfeasible, it would be permissible this year for the existing membership of a Local or National Assembly to continue on into the next administrative year. Naturally, any National Assembly giving thought to approving such a step will seek the advice of the Counsellors at an early stage.

At a time of another crisis, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered these words of counsel: "In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials and tribulations have encompassed the world, and fear and trembling have agitated the planet, ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated, and the light of assurance may dawn above the manifest horizon and shine resplendently." The world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts. Beloved friends, you have of course long been occupied with the work of nurturing within groups of souls precisely the attributes that are required at this time: unity and fellow feeling, knowledge and understanding, a spirit of collective worship and common endeavour. Indeed, we have been struck by how efforts to reinforce these attributes have made communities especially resilient, even when faced with conditions that have necessarily limited their activities. Though having to adapt to new circumstances, the believers have used creative means to strengthen bonds of friendship, and to foster among themselves and those known to them spiritual consciousness and qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God. The elevated conversations that have occurred as a result, whether remotely or in person, have been a source of comfort and inspiration to many. Such efforts on your part provide a valuable service at this hour when many souls are perplexed and dismayed, unsure of what will be. However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence.

This is not the moment in which to describe in any detail the accomplishments of the Bahá'í world over the past year, or the extraordinary progress made in multiplying community-building activities worldwide and strengthening programmes of growth, work which continues in earnest wherever circumstances permit. Suffice it to say that, four years into the current Plan, the tireless

supporters of the Cause have brought the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to the strongest position in which it has ever been in its history. Everything you have done and are now doing is preparing the global Bahá'í community for the next stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan.

For now, our thoughts and our prayers are focused on the health and well-being of all the friends of God and all those among whom you dwell. We pray earnestly, also, for the Almighty to bestow upon you assurance, stamina, and staunch spirits. May your minds be ever bent upon the needs of the communities to which you belong, the condition of the societies in which you live, and the welfare of the entire family of humanity, to whom you are all brothers and sisters. And in your quiet moments, when no course of action other than prayer seems possible, then we invite you to add your supplications to our own and ardently pray for the relief of suffering. We turn to these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whose whole existence was an example of selfless commitment to the well-being of others:

O Thou Provider! Assist Thou these noble friends to win Thy good pleasure, and make them well-wishers of stranger and friend alike. Bring them into the world that abideth forever; grant them a portion of heavenly grace; cause them to be true Bahá'ís, sincerely of God; save them from outward semblances, and establish them firmly in the truth. Make them signs and tokens of the Kingdom, luminous stars above the horizons of this nether life. Make them to be a comfort and a solace to humankind and servants to the peace of the world.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]