

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1965

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The tide of victory which carried the Bahá'í World community to the celebrations of the Most Great Jubilee is still rising. A ceaseless shower of divine confirmation rains upon our efforts, its evidences apparent in the many noteworthy achievements of the few brief months since the launching of the Nine Year Plan. The most spectacular of these is the increase in the number of centers where Bahá'ís reside from fifteen thousand one hundred and sixty-eight at Riḍván 1964 to twenty-one thousand and six at the present time, an increase of nearly six thousand in one year. No less remarkable is the progress of the teaching work in India where the number of believers now exceeds a hundred and forty thousand, an increase of more than thirty thousand since Riḍván 1964. Pioneers are moving to those few remaining territories of the earth as yet unilluminated by the light of God's new Revelation; "the vast increase" in the size of the Cause, called for at the launching of the Plan, appears to be developing, while in country after country the institutions and endowments of the Faith are being steadily and firmly established.

During the past twelve months the goals assigned to the World Center have been actively pursued. Basic decisions and actions to implement the goal of "Development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, with a view to extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation," have already been conveyed to the friends. Following their meeting in the Holy Land last October, the members of this august body, the Standard-Bearers of this Nine Year Plan as well as of the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Crusade, already laden with honors and services, have arisen with renewed and matchless vigor to rouse the spirits of the friends to meet the supreme teaching challenge, to lend their counsel and assistance to the administrative bodies, and to diffuse the divine fragrances and love of God through all the world. The increase in the numbers of Board members and the new executive arrangements will, it is confidently anticipated, enable the beloved Hands to discharge their important duties with even greater effectiveness and give them more time to travel and teach.

A preliminary survey of the conditions affecting the construction of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Latin America, one of the two edifices to be erected during the Plan, has already been undertaken, and we now invite Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í architects to submit designs for the Panama Temple. The terms and conditions of the submission, and the specifications of the structure, may be obtained from the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, whose choice of design will be subject to the ultimate approval of the Universal House of Justice. It is our hope that the construction of this sacred House of Worship, in a location accorded such special significance by both the Master and the Guardian, will be speedily accomplished, so that its beacon of spiritual light may radiate to all the Americas.

During the past twelve months the following new territories have been opened to the Faith: in the continent of Africa, Gabon, Ifni, Mali, Mauritania, Rodrigues Island and Upper Volta; in the continent of America, Aruba Island, Cozumel Island, Guadeloupe, Las Mujeres Island, Prince of Wales Island and St. Vincent; in the continent of Asia, the Ryukyu Islands; in the continent of Australasia, the Line Islands; in the continent of Europe, the Isle of Wight, the East and West Frisian Islands. The following territories have been reopened: in the continent of Africa, Mafia Island; in the continent of America, Antigua, French Guiana and Martinique; West Irian in the continent of Asia; and Admiralty Islands in Australasia. National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds have been acquired in nine places, the seats of National Spiritual Assemblies, and land has been acquired in two others on which to build this institution. Six National Spiritual Assemblies have become

incorporated and the Faith has been recognized in Cambodia, a country destined to have its own National Spiritual Assembly during the Nine Year Plan. National Endowments have been acquired in eight countries; six Teaching Institutes have been established, and land has been acquired for six others; a Bahá'í Publishing Trust for the provision of literature in the French language has been established in Brussels; Bahá'í Holy Days have been recognized in three territories; Bahá'í literature has been published in the following eleven new languages: Ibibio-Efik in the continent of Africa, Aguacateca, Athabaskan, Cariña and Motilon-Yukpa in the continent of America, Kenyah, Melanau and Temiar in the continent of Asia, and Ghari, Marshallese and Motua in Australasia. The progress of the Cause in Borneo makes possible the achievement of a goal supplementary to the Plan, namely the establishment at Riḍván 1966 of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brunei.

The passage of the first year of the Plan discloses two conditions in the Bahá'í World community. The first, within the Faith itself, is its capacity to accomplish all and any definitive goals assigned to it, goals such as the purchasing of Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, Temple Sites, Endowments, or the incorporation of Spiritual Assemblies; such objective and highly important goals as these, by which the Cause is established physically, legally and socially in the world, are now taken in its stride by the Administrative Order. It should be noted, moreover, that the accomplishment of many goals of this type, involves inter-Assembly cooperation, an international activity vital to the development of world order.

The second condition apparent after the passage of the first year of the Plan, involves the relationship of the Cause to humanity. Almost universally there is a sense of an impending breakthrough in large-scale conversion. Reports of the Hands of the Cause and of Board members constantly mention it; many National Spiritual Assemblies believe that they have reached the shores of this ocean. And, indeed, entry into the Cause by troops has been a fact in some areas for a number of years. But greater things are ahead. The teaching of the Faith must enkindle a world-encircling fire in whose light the Cause and the world—protagonists of the greatest drama in human history—are clearly illumined. Destiny is carrying us to this climax; we must gird ourselves for heroism.

Four challenging and immediate tasks present themselves. The first is to raise and dispatch, during the coming year, no less than four hundred and sixty pioneers who will open the fifty-four remaining virgin territories of the Plan, resettle the eighteen unoccupied ones, reinforce areas where the numbers and cohesion of the Bahá'í communities are at present inadequate to launch effective teaching plans, and support and extend the work in the areas of mass teaching. Let every believer consider this challenge, be he, in the words of the beloved Guardian, "in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor, whether veteran or newly enrolled ..."

To assist the pioneer efforts of the friends and their transfer to their posts during the next twelve months we announce the formation of five Continental Pioneer Committees, namely: Pioneer Committee for Africa appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles; Pioneer Committee for the Americas appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States; Pioneer Committee for Asia appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Persia; Pioneer Committee for Australasia appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia; Pioneer Committee for Europe appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany.

These Committees will in no way infringe the responsibilities of other Pioneer Committees, or of National Spiritual Assemblies, who are in charge of the teaching work, and under whose jurisdiction they will function. They are established to facilitate and assist the work of these national bodies by providing effective exchange of vital information, both continentally and intercontinentally, by assisting in the routing of pioneer offers and in the transfer of pioneers to their posts.

A careful estimate has been made of the pioneer needs of every area during the next twelve months and the result, including those for the seventy-two areas mentioned above, is a call for four hundred and sixty-one pioneers; eighty-six for Africa, ninety-six for the Americas, one hundred and ninety-one for Asia, twenty-nine for Australasia, and fifty-nine for Europe. Each National Spiritual Assembly has been consulted as to its pioneer needs and these have been made known to all National Spiritual Assemblies as well as to the five Continental Pioneer Committees, who will be kept currently informed of progress by the National Spiritual Assemblies. The friends, therefore, are urged to consult their National Spiritual Assemblies for information about pioneer needs and responsibilities both of their own communities and in general.

For the first time in Bahá'í history, an International Deputization Fund has been established at the World Center under the administration of the Universal House of Justice. From it supplementary support will be given to specific pioneering projects when other funds are not available. All friends, and particularly those who are unable to respond to the pioneer call are invited to support this Fund, mindful of the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, "Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, Whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded."

The second challenge facing us is to raise the intensity of teaching to a pitch never before attained, in order to realize that "vast increase" called for in the Plan. Universal participation and constant action will win this goal. Every believer has a part to play, and is capable of playing it, for every soul meets others, and, as promised by Bahá'u'lláh, "Whosoever ariseth to aid Our Cause God will render him victorious ..." The confusion of the world is not diminishing, rather does it increase with each passing day, and men and women are losing faith in human remedies. Realization is at last dawning that "There is no place to flee to" save God. Now is the golden opportunity; people are willing, in many places eager, to listen to the divine remedy.

The third challenge is to acquire as rapidly as possible all the remaining National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, Temple Sites, National Endowments and Teaching Institutes called for in the Plan. The speedy conclusion of these projects will save tremendous expense later and endow the Faith with increasingly valuable properties. These basic possessions are the embryos of mighty institutions of the future, but it is this generation, which, for its own protection and as its gift to posterity, must acquire them. We call upon the National Spiritual Assemblies charged with responsibility in this field to accord it high priority. A further, but equally important consideration, is, that the achievement of this goal in the early years of the Plan will liberate the energies and resources of the growing world community for a concentrated, resolute and relentless pursuit in its later stages of great victories whose foundations are now being laid.

The fourth challenge is to prepare national and local plans for the befitting celebration of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation of His Message in September/October, 1867, to the kings and rulers of the world, celebrations to be followed during the remainder of the Nine Year Plan by a sustained and well-planned program of proclamation of that same Message to the generality of mankind.

A review of the historic proclamation by Bahá'u'lláh, as described by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*, reveals that its "opening notes" were "sounded during the latter part of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Adrianople," and that, six years later, it "closed during the early years of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of 'Akká." These "opening notes" were the mighty and awe-inspiring words addressed by Him to the kings and rulers collectively in the Súriy-i-Mulúk, "the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh." It was penned some time during the months of September and October, 1867, and was followed by "Tablets unnumbered ... in which the implications of His newly-asserted claims were fully expounded." "Kings and emperors, severally and collectively; the chief magistrates of the Republics of the American continent; ministers and

ambassadors; the Sovereign Pontiff himself; the Vicar of the Prophet of Islám; the royal Trustee of the Kingdom of the Hidden Imám; the monarchs of Christendom, its patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks; the recognized leaders of both the Sunní and Shí'ah sacerdotal orders; the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion; the philosophers, the ecclesiastical leaders, the wise men and the inhabitants of Constantinople—that proud seat of both the Sultanate and the Caliphate; the entire company of the professed adherents of the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian and Muslim Faiths; the people of the Bayán; the wise men of the world, its men of letters, its poets, its mystics, its tradesmen, the elected representatives of its peoples; His own countrymen"; all were "brought directly within the purview of the exhortations, the warnings, the appeals, the declarations and the prophecies which constitute the theme of His momentous summons to the leaders of mankind ..." "Unique and stupendous as was this proclamation, it proved to be but a prelude to a still mightier revelation of the creative power of its Author, and to what may well rank as the most signal act of His ministry—the promulgation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas." In this, the Most Holy Book, revealed in 1873, Bahá'u'lláh not only once more announces to the kings of the earth collectively that "He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared" but addresses reigning sovereigns distinctively by name and proclaims to the "Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein" that "the Promised One hath appeared." Such was the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to mankind. As He Himself testified, "Never since the beginning of the world hath the Message been so openly proclaimed."

The celebration of this fate-laden centenary period will open with a visit, in September 1967, on the Feast of Mashíyyat, by a few appointed representatives of the Bahá'í World to the site of the house in Adrianople, where the historic Súriy-i-Mulúk was revealed.

Immediately following this joyful and pious act, six Intercontinental Conferences will be simultaneously held during the month of October in Panama City, Wilmette, Sydney, Kampala, Frankfurt, and New Delhi. The host and convener of each Conference will be the National Spiritual Assembly in whose area it takes place. The following Hands of the Cause of God will represent the Universal House of Justice at these Conferences: Panama City—Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, who will, on that occasion, lay the foundation stone of the Temple; Wilmette—Leroy Ioas; Sydney—Ugo Giachery; Kampala—'Alí-Akbar Furútan; Frankfurt—Paul Haney; New Delhi—Abu'l-Qásim Faizi.

All National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to arrange befitting observances, on a national and local scale, of the opening of the centenary period during September/October, 1967, and between the above Conferences and Riḍván 1968, at which time the second International Convention for the election of the Universal House of Justice will be held at the World Center.

The successful carrying out of all these plans will constitute a befitting commemoration, commensurate with the resources of the Bahá'í World community, of the sacred event they recall.

These six Conferences, like the epoch-making event whose centenary they commemorate, will sound the "opening notes" of a period of proclamation of the Cause of God extending through the remaining years of the Nine Year Plan to the centenary, in 1973, of the Revelation of the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas," an activity which calls for the ardent and imaginative study of all National and Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

The international scene will witness the holding of Oceanic Conferences forecast by Shoghi Effendi. The first one will be held during August 1968 on an island in the Mediterranean Sea to commemorate Bahá'u'lláh's voyage upon that sea, a hundred years before, from Gallipoli in Turkey to the Most Great Prison in 'Akká. In the subsequent years of the Nine Year Plan, others will be held in the Atlantic Ocean, in the Caribbean Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean.

In calling upon all National Spiritual Assemblies to consider now the appointment of National Proclamation Committees charged with laying feasible and effective plans for the proclamation of

the Faith throughout the entire centenary period, we can do no better than call attention to the following passage from a letter written by our beloved Guardian in connection with the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of the Bahá'í Era:

An unprecedented, a carefully conceived, efficiently co-ordinated, nation-wide campaign, aiming at the proclamation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, through speeches, articles in the press, and radio broadcasts, should be promptly initiated and vigorously prosecuted. The universality of the Faith, its aims and purposes, episodes in its dramatic history, testimonials to its transforming power, and the character and distinguishing features of its World Order should be emphasized and explained to the general public, and particularly to eminent friends and leaders sympathetic to its cause, who should be approached and invited to participate in the celebrations. Lectures, conferences, banquets, special publications should, to whatever extent is practicable and according to the resources at the disposal of the believers, proclaim the character of this joyous Festival.

The majestic process launched by our beloved Guardian in 1953, when he called the widely scattered, obscure Bahá'í World community to embark upon that first, glorious, world-encompassing crusade, is gathering momentum, and posterity may well gaze with awe upon the development, by so small a fraction of the human race and in a world entangled in opposition, enmity and disruption, of the very pattern and sinews of world order. This divinely propelled and long-promised development must continue its historic course until its final consummation in the glories and splendors of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the Kingdom of God on earth.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]