

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1971

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

On November 28th 1971 the Bahá'í World will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, the Ensign of the Oneness of Mankind, the Mystery of God, an event which signaled at once the end of the Heroic Age of our Faith, the opening of the Formative Age and the birth of the Administrative Order, the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. As we contemplate the fruits of the Master's Ministry harvested during the first fifty years of the Formative Age, a period dominated by the dynamic and beloved figure of Shoghi Effendi, whose life was dedicated to the systematic implementation of the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of the Tablets of the Divine Plan—the two charters provided by the Master for the administration and the teaching of the Cause of God—we may well experience a sense of awe at the prospect of the next fifty years. That first half-century of the Formative Age has seen the Bahá'í Community grow from a few hundred centers in 35 countries in 1921, to over 46,000 centers in 135 independent states and 182 significant territories and islands at the present day, has been marked by the raising throughout the world of the framework of the Administrative Order, which in its turn has brought recognition of the Faith by many governments and civil authorities and accreditation in consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and has witnessed the spread to many parts of the world of that "entry by troops" promised by the Master and so long and so eagerly anticipated by the friends.

A new horizon, bright with intimations of thrilling developments in the unfolding life of the Cause of God, is now discernible. The approach to it is complete victory in the Nine Year Plan. For we should never forget that the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Crusade, the current Nine Year Plan, other plans to follow throughout successive epochs of the Formative Age of the Faith, are all phases in the implementation of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, set out in fourteen of His Tablets to North America.

The Nine Year Plan is well advanced, and this Riḍván will witness the establishment of seven more National Spiritual Assemblies, five in Africa, one in South America and one in the Pacific, bringing the total number of these exalted bodies to 101. Next Riḍván the nine already announced will be formed, together with 4 more, one each in Afghanistan, Arabia, the Windward Islands and Puerto Rico, bringing the total to 114, six more than called for in the Nine Year Plan. The members of all National Spiritual Assemblies which will be elected at Riḍván 1972 will take part in the election of the Universal House of Justice at Riḍván 1973, when an international convention will be held at the World Center.

The Mother Temple of Latin America, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Panama, is scheduled to be completed by December 1971 and its dedication will take place at the following Riḍván.

The wonderful spirit released at the four Oceanic and Intercontinental Conferences, together with the practical benefits which accrued to the Cause from them, reinforce our high hopes that the four Conferences to be held this year will be resounding successes and result in more pioneers, more traveling teachers, greater proclamation of the Message and a raising of the spirits and devotion of the friends.

Our appeal to the friends in December 1970 for support of the Bahá'í International Fund, which had reached a serious condition due to various unforeseen circumstances, has had a magnificent response from many quarters of the worldwide Bahá'í Community, and we are

heartened to believe that this manifestation of devotion and sacrifice, as it continues and becomes more widespread, will resolve the condition that had threatened to adversely affect the attainment of cherished goals of the Nine Year Plan.

The travels and other services of the Hands of the Cause of God continually evoke our thankfulness and delight, even wonder and astonishment. Their deeds are such as to eclipse the acts of the apostles of old and to confer eternal splendor on this period of the Formative Age. On behalf of all the friends everywhere, we offer them our reverent love and gratitude. It is fitting to record here the passing, after seventy years' exemplary service to the Faith, of the Hand of the Cause Agnes Alexander, whose early services in Hawaii were said by the Master to be greater than if she had founded an empire.

Restrictive measures, directed against the Faith, and varying in severity from outright oppression to imposition of disabilities make virtually impossible the achievement of the goals of the Nine Year Plan in a number of countries, particularly in the Middle East, in North West Africa, along the fringes of East Africa and certain areas in South East Asia. It is hoped that those Bahá'í communities which enjoy freedom to teach their Faith will so far surpass their own goals as to amply compensate for the disabilities suffered by their less fortunate brothers. The army of traveling teachers must be reinforced and the friends, particularly Bahá'í youth, are called to seriously consider how much time they can offer to the Faith during the remaining two years of the Nine Year Plan. Teaching visits of brief or long duration, deputization of others, the undertaking of such tasks as would free other friends for teaching work, are all means of building up, in unison, that final surge which will carry the Plan to victory.

Two major objectives of the Plan are the formation of new Local Spiritual Assemblies and the opening of new localities. 14,966 Local Spiritual Assemblies are called for; 10,360 are now in existence. 54,503 localities must claim a Bahá'í resident; 46,334 do so now. The goal is in sight, the time short. However, the growth reflected in the above statistics has not taken place at all levels and in all areas. For while a number of national communities have already achieved, or even surpassed the goals assigned to them, many face extreme difficulties in attaining theirs. With mutual help and an increase in the momentum already generated there is no doubt that the community of the Most Great Name is capable of sweeping on to total victory, thereby gaining a view of those enthralling vistas at present beyond the horizon.

The twin processes so clearly described by the beloved Guardian in his essay "The Unfoldment of World Civilization"—the steady progress and consolidation of the Cause of God on the one hand and the progressive disintegration of a moribund world on the other—will undoubtedly impose upon us new tasks, the obligation of devising new approaches to teaching, of demonstrating more clearly to a disillusioned world the Bahá'í way of life and making more effective the administrative institutions of the Faith. The authority and influence of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be strengthened in order to deal with larger Bahá'í communities; the international character of the Cause will need to be developed, while the international teaching agency at the World Center, already referred to in previous general letters, will be established.

However fascinating such considerations, which are likely to be forced upon our attention in the near future, may be, they must not deflect our energies and will from the immediate task—the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Their achievement is the best preparation for the future and the means of developing new powers and capacities in the Bahá'í Community. We are confident that the Army of Light, growing in strength and unity will, by 1973, the centenary year of the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, have scaled the heights of yet another peak in the path leading ultimately to the broad uplands of the Most Great Peace.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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