

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1978

To the International Bahá'í Convention

Dearly Loved Friends,

The Universal House of Justice takes great pleasure in addressing the members of National Spiritual Assemblies gathered in the Holy Land, in the presence of Hands of the Cause of God and Counselors from all continents, at this fourth International Convention, pausing with you to review the course and needs of the Five Year Plan as we cross the threshold of its final year.

The opening of the Plan witnessed the eager response of the friends, careful study made by the national institutions of the Faith of its implications and requirements, the establishment of machinery and the setting up of projects to achieve its goals, and the often arduous struggle to fulfill the first of its three major objectives—the safeguarding and consolidation of all prizes won in earlier campaigns. This phase extended in many countries over a period of several months, and in others continued as far as the midway point of the Plan.

The middle year of the Plan saw the holding of the International Conferences and those many regional and national conferences which were held concurrently and diffused far and wide the inspiration flowing from these eight major assemblages of the believers. These gatherings motivated a great acceleration of the work and helped the believers throughout the world to arrive at a new realization of the responsibility entrusted to the followers of the Most Great Name for the spiritual regeneration of their fellowmen.

We are now in the last stage of the Plan, and this Convention provides us with a welcome and auspicious hour in which to assess our progress and to direct our thoughts to the complete achievement of the goals.

Of the 130 National Spiritual Assemblies which will be operating during the last year of the Plan, 50 have either achieved or nearly achieved their teaching goals. Of the remaining 80 National Spiritual Assemblies, some 40 are confidently forging ahead and are assured of victory if the present tempo in their teaching work is maintained. Nine National Assemblies are restricted by conditions which make the fulfillment of their homefront goals dependent upon circumstances beyond their control. The remaining 30 national communities are, alas, seriously lagging behind, and only strenuous and sacrificial effort will enable them to win their goals.

The second of the three major objectives of the Plan—a vast and widespread expansion of the Bahá'í community—has seen great but geographically uneven progress. There are now more than 19,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies and the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside is over 83,000. This expansion has been accompanied by an intensification of proclamation efforts and by increased use of mass media such as radio and television.

There have been notable advances in the process of gaining wider recognition for the Cause of God and in fostering cordial relations with civil authorities, a matter of vital importance in these days when there is a growth of opposition to the Faith from those who, misconstruing its true nature and aims, take alarm at its progress.

Some of the most significant achievements of the Plan have been towards its third major objective—the development of the distinctive character of Bahá'í life—and in the consolidation and strengthening of the structure of the Bahá'í community. The beloved Hands of the Cause of God,

who have been in the forefront of so many aspects of the work of the Faith, have rendered far-reaching services in this field.

The Local Spiritual Assemblies, focal centers for the teaching of the Faith and the consolidation of the community, are growing in experience, maturity and wisdom, are proving to be potent instruments for nurturing the Bahá'í life and are, in increasing numbers, carrying out plans for the establishment of the Faith in areas outside their own range of jurisdiction, under the overall guidance of their National Spiritual Assemblies, and with the encouragement and help of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants. The work of developing Local Spiritual Assemblies is a task without end in the foreseeable future. As the Bahá'í community, which is still very thinly spread around the world, moves continually and with increasing rapidity into new areas, new Assemblies will come into being and will need patient help and training in their sacred duties.

The devotion and self-sacrifice of the friends, which have drawn to them the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, have resulted in the very great advances made so far. Evidences of this striving are apparent in the growing number of national communities which, under the wise stewardship and challenging leadership of their National Spiritual Assemblies, are becoming financially self-supporting; in the fact that ever more individual believers are adopting for themselves specific goals and plans of service for the advancement of the Faith; in the settlement of more than 2,000 pioneers during the course of the Plan; in the upsurge of travel teaching individually and in teams; in a greater awareness of the power of prayer; and in many other ways. Three vital aspects of Bahá'í community life which have seen marked progress during the past four years are the development of the services of women and of youth, and the Bahá'í education of children. The youth have long been in the forefront of the teaching work, and now our hearts rejoice to see the women, in so many lands where previously their capacities were largely left unused, devoting their capable services to the life of the Bahá'í community. The education of Bahá'í children is also receiving much attention, which bodes well for the future generations of Bahá'ís.

Experience has shown that active and loving collaboration between the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies has been a particularly invigorating and strengthening factor in the progress of the Cause in all aspects of the work. Reflecting the growth of the community, the number of Continental Counselors has been raised to 64 during the Plan, and the number of Auxiliary Boards to 675. Under the authorization given to them, the members of the Auxiliary Boards have till now appointed 3,358 assistants, who are already playing a significant role in the formation and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the fostering of the Bahá'í way of life in local communities. Coordinating and directing the work of these Continental Boards from the Holy Land, the International Teaching Centre is now well established in the conduct of its responsibilities, foreshadowing the mighty role that it is destined to play in the functioning of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Faith is passing through a time of tremendous opportunity and development, as well as of increasing opposition and of growing complexity in the problems confronting it. These opportunities must be seized and these problems overcome, for so crucial are these times that the future course of human history is daily in the balance. During this year the Universal House of Justice will be consulting on the nature, duration and goals of the next stage in the implementation of the Divine Plan. The firm base of the achievement of the Five Year Plan goals, both those of quality and those of quantity, is therefore the burning necessity of the months now before us. Let us go forward in a spirit of optimism, with confidence, determination, courage and unity. The greater the love and unity among the friends, the more speedily will the work advance.

May the Almighty bless the endeavors of His servants and inspire their hearts to arise in His Cause with that degree of radiant faith and self-sacrifice which will draw to their aid the conquering hosts of the Supreme Concurrence.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

