

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

13 December 1983

To the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Alaska, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Hawaiian Islands, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has been consulting upon aspects of youth service in pioneering throughout the Bahá'í world, and has requested that we convey its views on service in other lands undertaken by Bahá'í youth with voluntary nonsectarian organizations.

In the past, the policy adopted by some National Assemblies was to discourage young Bahá'ís from enrolling to serve in activities sponsored by non-Bahá'í voluntary organizations, as the Assemblies were under the impression that these young people would not be able to engage in direct teaching, nor participate, for the most part, in Bahá'í activities while serving abroad in such programs. Perhaps in some instances the Bahá'ís involved were not sure how to function as members of the Bahá'í community in order to give each aspect of their lives its proper due.

In the light of experience, however, it is now clear that we should have no misgivings in encouraging young Bahá'ís to enroll in such voluntary service organization programs as the United Nations Volunteers, United States Peace Corps, Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) and similar Canadian agencies, the British Volunteer Program (BVP) of the United Kingdom, and other voluntary service organizations. Other countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian lands are understood to have similar service organizations which are compatible with Bahá'í development goals as now tentatively envisaged.

Some of the advantages of such service to the Faith are worth mentioning. Volunteers will receive thorough orientation and sometimes will be taught basic skills which will enable them to help the Bahá'í community in projects undertaken in developing countries. Wherever they serve, these volunteers should be able to participate in Bahá'í activities and contribute to the consolidation of the Bahá'í community. The freedom to teach is to a large extent dependent upon the local interpretation of the group leader, but even if volunteers do not engage in direct teaching, being known as Bahá'ís and showing the Bahá'í spirit and attitude towards work and service should attract favorable attention and may, in many instances, be instrumental in attracting individuals to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. And finally, the period of overseas service often produces a taste for such service, and volunteers may well offer to directly promote the pioneer work either in the same country or in another developing country.

It is well known that a considerable number of Bahá'ís have already gone abroad to serve with these agencies and that others have espoused the Faith while serving in foreign lands with voluntary service organizations....

National Spiritual Assemblies which hold orientation courses for pioneers may benefit from including the subject of rural development in their program, and, as in the past, from inviting people who have served in voluntary service organizations to participate in the planning of orientation programs and in having them share their experiences as volunteer workers in developing countries.

The House of Justice expresses the hope that the information contained in this letter will dispel the misunderstandings that have in the past surrounded the question of participation of Bahá'í youth in projects sponsored by non-Bahá'í voluntary organizations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat