

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

15 July 1987

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has studied carefully the information conveyed in your minutes about the functioning of your Executive Committee. It has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

It is entirely appropriate for your Assembly to appoint an Executive Committee and to authorize it to take action between National Spiritual Assembly meetings. While a committee of this type can be of considerable value to your Assembly, great care and close monitoring is required to guard against its becoming a source of difficulties which could ultimately weaken the authority of the Assembly.

Such a committee may be authorized to handle emergency matters which legitimately cannot await consultation by the full membership of the National Assembly, or matters which are of a routine nature and which can be dealt with through straightforward application of existing policy. Care is needed to ensure that the Executive Committee does not stray inadvertently beyond these bounds, and the functioning of the Committee should be a matter of careful review by the Assembly periodically.

The National Assembly has the responsibility to select the Assembly members who are to comprise the Committee. Valid meetings of the Executive Committee can take place only when all of its appointed members are duly notified. All members of the Assembly who have taken no part in the Executive Committee meeting should be informed of the decisions and actions taken, as soon after the meeting as practicable. This will afford them the opportunity to express the view as to whether the matter considered by the Committee should properly await a full meeting of the National Assembly. There may, of course, be instances when the urgency of a matter is such that a Committee decision has to be implemented before the other Assembly members can be informed; such instances are likely to be rare, and the Committee should be prepared to explain to the next meeting of the Assembly why it felt it necessary to proceed with such speed.

Furthermore, the matters considered by the Executive Committee should be placed on the agenda for the next full meeting of the National Assembly for ratification or otherwise. The House of Justice does not feel that it is sufficient to regard Executive Committee minutes as being "approved in principle" in the course of subsequent National Assembly consultation, nor does it feel that it is correct to delay submission of a full report of Executive Committee decisions to other than the next Assembly meeting.

As stated above, the House of Justice recognizes the value of your having an Executive Committee to avoid taking up the limited Assembly consultation time with routine matters, and to provide a mechanism by which urgent matters can be dealt with. However, it cautions you to be aware that there are dangers that such a committee could create a caucus within the Assembly membership which comes to the meetings with matters already discussed and minds made up. The Assembly must be vigilant to ensure that such an unfortunate condition does not occur, and that the Executive Committee does not unintentionally take over and handle the work of the National Assembly itself. Limits on the functioning of the Committee should be set and observed, and the definition of what constitutes an urgent matter constantly monitored.

With the progressive development of efficient means of communication, it should be possible to involve a greater number of the Assembly members, if not all, in consultation on emergency issues without the necessity for all members to be physically present in the same location. While such facilities may not exist at the present time in . . . , their future development will doubtless remove some of the difficulties associated with decisions being made on urgent matters by a committee rather than by the full Assembly.

The House of Justice commends to your careful attention the points made in this letter, and assures you of its prayers for the confirmation of your devoted efforts to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat