

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

14 December 1987

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

At the conference of representatives for external affairs held in Langenhain last month, a question was raised about Bahá'í relations towards governments and the principle of noninvolvement in politics. The representative of the Universal House of Justice referred to a letter dealing with this question which was sent to an individual at the direction of the House of Justice. We have now been requested to send to each of you for your information a copy of that letter dated 23 June 1987. It is enclosed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

23 June 1987

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 13 December 1986 inquiring about permissible activities of the Bahá'ís in relation to governments, but due to the pressure of many priorities at the World Center a reply to it regrettably has been delayed. We have been asked to convey the following.

Your letter touches upon a subject which, as time passes, will increasingly engage the attention of the House of Justice in accordance with its responsibilities as explicitly assigned in the Holy Texts. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh states:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 93)

Elsewhere He states:

It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 89)

And yet again He asserts:

All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 27)

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said in a talk:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 1982 ed., p. 455)

As can be seen from the current situation in the world and the current state in the development of the Bahá'í community, statements such as these indicate a future stage in the functioning of the House of Justice and of the operation of our world community; but in the meantime, the House of Justice will determine, as particular circumstances warrant, how the Bahá'ís and their national and local institutions will relate to their respective governments.

The general policy already enunciated by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 63–67, should be scrupulously upheld by the friends. However, as the Faith emerges from obscurity, the application of certain aspects of this policy will require the clarification of the House of Justice. With the passage of time, practices in the political realm will definitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Bahá'í writings. As a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of noninvolvement in politics will also undergo a change; but as Shoghi Effendi has written, this instruction, “at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West.”

In view of the necessity of the Bahá'í community to relate to governments, whether for reasons of defending its persecuted members or of responding to opportunities to be of service, a correct understanding of what is legitimate Bahá'í action in the face of the policy of noninterference with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Bahá'í community into certain relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá'í community must increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient.

The support of passage of the Genocide Convention in the United States Senate, referred to in your letter, is a case in point. The particular circumstances which influenced the National Spiritual Assembly's involvement in the matter were delicate and compelling. There may be other situations in which significant questions being considered by a government are so intimately related to fundamental principles of our Faith, and the conditions are such, that the maintenance of strict neutrality on the part of the Bahá'í community to an individual believer would not be in the best interests of either the Faith or society. Awareness of this probability should, however, not cause the friends to go at a tangent and take such sensitive matters into their own hands. In any such situation the National Spiritual Assembly must weigh carefully the consequences, pro and con, of any contemplated action and carry out its decision, preferably with the foreknowledge and consent of the House of Justice. The friends must learn to appreciate this new situation, to acquiesce in the prerogative of their elected institutions to decide on questions involving or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in the incontrovertible promise of Bahá'u'lláh to protect His community.

Considering the unusual challenges facing National Spiritual Assemblies, particularly resulting from the persecutions in Iran and the issuance of the Peace Statement, the Universal House of Justice will surely continue to guide these institutions to relate to their governments in ways which will preserve the essentials of the policy of noninvolvement in politics.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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