

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 1987

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The launching of the Six Year Plan at Ridvan 1986 coincided with the opening of a new epoch—the fourth—in the organic unfoldment of the Formative Age of our Faith. The administrative institutions of this growing Cause of God had already begun to show signs of an increasing maturity, while at the same time emerging from the protective obscurity of their early days into the larger arena of public notice. These twin processes were signalized by a development of far-reaching consequence to the internal life of the Bahá'í community and by an outward activity of a magnitude unprecedented in its entire history.

The former was a devolution of responsibility whereby all national communities, through their National Spiritual Assemblies, in consultation with Counselors, Local Spiritual Assemblies and the generality of believers, were requested to formulate, for the first time, their own objectives for achievement during the new Plan. This expectation of maturity challenging the national communities was matched by their formulation of national plans submitted to the World Center for coordination into the world-embracing Six Year Plan.

The latter was a united uprising of the entire Bahá'í world community to distribute the statement, "The Promise of World Peace," issued in October 1985, to the peoples of the world. Heads of State, large numbers of the members of national governments, diplomats, teachers, trade unionists, leaders of religion, eminent members of the judiciary, the police, legal, medical and other professions, members of local authorities, clubs and associations, and thousands of individuals have been presented with the statement. It is estimated that more than a million copies, in some seventy languages, have so far been distributed. These two activities alone have heavily reinforced the growing strength and maturity of the Bahá'í world community and given it a more clearly defined and readily recognizable public image.

Other factors have contributed greatly to the rapid entrance of the Faith onto the world stage. Indeed it appears that every activity of the widespread Army of Life is now observed or commented upon by some section of the public, from the General Assembly of the United Nations to small and even remote local communities.

The steadfastness of the sorely-tried Persian believers continues to be the mainspring of this world-wide attention increasingly being focused upon the Faith. While the brutal executions of heroic martyrs are now less frequent, the harassment and deprivations, vilification and plundering of the long-persecuted community continue—more than 200 are still in prison—giving the representatives of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations firm grounds for strong and persistent appeals, which have aroused the concern of the General

Assembly itself, and resulted in representations to the Iranian Government on behalf of the defenseless Bahá'ís by the Commission on Human Rights, and by many powerful nations including the various governments constituting the European Community.

All this has kept our beloved Faith under international observation, an interest increased not only by the circulation of the Peace Statement but also by the rapidly expanding activities in the field of economic and social development, ranging from the inauguration and operation of radio stations—of which there are seven now broadcasting—to schools, literacy programs, agricultural assistance and a host of small but valuable undertakings at village level in many parts of the world.

National Bahá'í communities have organized and successfully conducted inter-religious conferences, peace seminars, symposiums on racism and other subjects on which we have a specific contribution to make, often achieving widespread publicity and the interest of highly-placed leaders of society. Bahá'í youth, inspired and uplifted by the vision and idealism of "the new race of men" have, through their many gatherings, attracted large numbers of their compeers and galvanized their own members to direct their lives towards service in the many fields in which a rich harvest awaits the dedicated Bahá'í worker.

Added to this rapidly burgeoning association of our fellowmen with Bahá'í activities, has been one outstanding magnificent achievement, the completion and dedication of the wondrous Bahá'í Temple in New Delhi, which received, within the first thirty days of its dedication to the worship of God, more than 120,000 visitors. This symbol of purity, proclaiming the Oneness of God and His Messengers in that land of myriad diverse religious beliefs, befittingly marks the power and grandeur with which these portentous days in the life of God's Holy Cause have been endowed.

The stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God. The immediate and basic challenge is pursuit of the goals of the Six Year Plan, the preliminary stages of which have already been initiated. The all-important teaching work must be imaginatively, persistently and sacrificially continued, ensuring the enrollment of ever larger numbers who will provide the energy, the resources and spiritual force to enable the beloved Cause to worthily play its part in the redemption of mankind. To reinforce this process the international goals of the Plan have been adopted, calling for the undertaking of many hundreds of inter-assembly assistance projects, the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire at Ridvan 1987 and the establishment, in the course of the Plan, of new National Spiritual Assemblies, of which those of Angola, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Macau have already been approved. During the first year of the Six Year Plan 338 pioneers, guided by the needs set forth in previous plans, have already arisen and settled in 119 countries. A new appeal is now being prepared, details of which will be announced shortly. The promotion and facilitation of service projects for Bahá'í youth in the emergent countries of the world are now called for. National Spiritual Assemblies are asked to arrange, in consultation with each other and with the assistance of the Continental Board of Counselors, the best means of ensuring the effective service of those who respond.

Preparations for the Holy Year 1992, when the 100th Anniversary of the Ascension of the Blessed Beauty and the inception of the Covenant will be commemorated, have already begun. It is fitting, then, that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, which links the past and the future with the progressive stages towards the fulfillment of God's ancient Promise, should be the major theme of the Six Year Plan. Concentration on this theme will enable us all to obtain a deeper appreciation of the meaning and purpose of His Revelation—"A Revelation," in the words of

the Guardian, "hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signalized the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfillment, unsurpassed alike in the duration of its Author's ministry and the fecundity and splendor of His mission...." The questions that such concentrated study should answer will undoubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, its origin and what should be our attitude towards it.

Ever present in our contemplation of these profound questions is the magnetic figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, the Mystery of God, the perfect Exemplar, Whose unerring interpretation of the Holy Texts and luminous examples of their application to personal conduct shed light on a way of life we must strive diligently to follow. During the course of the Six Year Plan the 75th anniversary of His visit to the West will be observed with befitting celebrations and proclamation activities. Simultaneously, there will be observed the 50th anniversary of the first Seven Year Plan in the Americas, launched in 1937 at the instigation of Shoghi Effendi, and which, in setting in motion the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grand design for the spiritual conquest of the planet, marked the opening of the first epoch of the Divine Plan.

Great and wonderful tasks challenge us as never before. They demand equally great and wonderful sacrifice, dedication and single-minded devotion from every one of us. At present, the Bahá'í International Fund is utterly inadequate to support the tremendous expansion now required in all the multitudinous activities of the Bahá'í world community. The record of the Seven Year Plan, just completed, stands witness to our ability to meet the growing demands of the Cause. The heroism of the beloved friends in Iran, the eager response of 3,694 dedicated pioneers to the call raised for this essential service, the unceasing activity of teachers, administrators, local communities and individual believers throughout the entire organism of the embryonic world order, have endowed this growing Army of Life with new strengths and capacities. As we stride forward into the future we may be fully assured of His ever present bounty and the final victory of our efforts to establish His Kingdom in this troubled world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[SIGNED: THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]