

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 1989

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The spiritual current which exerted such galvanic effects at the International Bahá'í Convention last Ridván has swept through the entire world community, arousing its members in both the East and the West to feats of activity and achievement in teaching never before experienced in any one year. The high level of enrollments alone bears this out, as nearly half a million new believers have already been reported. The names of such far-flung places as India and Liberia, Bolivia and Bangladesh, Taiwan and Peru, the Philippines and Haiti leap to the fore as we contemplate the accumulating evidences of the entry by troops called for in our message of a year ago. These evidences are hopeful signs of the greater acceleration yet to come and in which all national communities, whatever the current status of their teaching effort, will ultimately be involved.

We look back with feelings of humble gratitude and heightened expectations at the stupendous developments which have taken place in so brief a period. One such development has been the adoption of the architectural design conceived by Mr. Fariburz Saḥbá for the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb, which launches a new stage towards the realization of the Master's and the Guardian's vision for the path along which the kings and rulers will ascend the slopes of Mount Carmel to pay homage at the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh's Martyr-Herald. Other developments include: the approval by the central authorities in Moscow of the application submitted by a number of Bahá'ís in Iṣḥqábád to restore the Local Spiritual Assembly of that city; the initiation of steps to open a Bahá'í Information Centre in Budapest, the first such agency of the Faith in the Eastern Bloc; the establishment of a branch of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information in Hong Kong in anticipation of the time when the Faith can be proclaimed on the mainland of China.

Also outstanding among these developments have been the successful co-sponsorship by the Bahá'í International Community of the "Arts for Nature" programme in London held to benefit the work of the World Wide Fund for Nature; the signing of an agreement in Geneva establishing formal working relations between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Bahá'í International Community; the official approval of a Bahá'í curriculum for public schools in New South Wales, Australia; the immense stream of visitors to the Temple in New Delhi, swelling to some four million since that edifice's inauguration in December 1986, and including an unusual number of high government officials and other prominent persons from many lands, among them China, the Soviet Union and countries of the Eastern Bloc. These, added to numerous other highlights of this single year, merge with the overall record of accomplishments thus far in the Six Year Plan, presenting a dynamic picture of accelerated activity throughout the Bahá'í world.

No reference to such marvelous progress could fail to acknowledge the spiritual and social impact effected by the decade-long episode of persecution inflicted with such cruel excesses on our Iranian fellow-believers. Only in the future will the full consequence of their sacrifice be known, but we can clearly recognize its influence on the extraordinary success in proclaiming the Faith and in establishing good relations with governmental authorities and major non-governmental organizations around the world. It is therefore with profound thanksgiving and joy that we announce the release of the vast majority of Bahá'í prisoners in Iran. Even as we rejoice we cannot forget that there remain to be realized the full emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'í community and the assurance of the human rights of its members in all respects.

In the gladness of the moment, we extend a warm welcome to the two National Spiritual Assemblies being formed this Rídván: one in Macau in Southeast Asia, the other in Guinea-Bissau in West Africa.

Through the shadow of confusion deranging present-day society, there is a far glimmer, yet so faint but discernible, of an approach, slow but definite, towards the culmination of the three collateral processes envisaged by the beloved Guardian, namely: the emergence of the Lesser Peace, the construction of the buildings on the Arc on Mount Carmel and the evolution of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Indeed, throughout the Six Year Plan, during this fourth epoch of the Formative Age, and particularly during the year just ended, this glimmer, still so distant, has drawn closer. For who could have imagined, even at the beginning of this Plan, the sudden changes of attitude moving political leaders in some of the most troubled spots on the planet to break away from seemingly intractable positions—changes which in recent months have prompted editorial writers to ask: "Is peace breaking out?"? To any observer conscious of the divine Source of such occurrences, this development must certainly be encouraging, although the precise circumstances attending the establishment of the Lesser Peace are not known to us; even its exact timing is concealed in the Major Plan of God.

The two other processes, however, are directly influenced by the degree to which the followers of Bahá'u'lláh fulfill their clearly delineated tasks. There is good reason to take heart. For have not the architectural concepts for the remaining buildings on the Arc been adopted and the detailed specifications which will effect their realization as splendid monumental structures been undertaken? Have we not witnessed the increasing strength of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in their ability to conceive and execute plans, in their capacity to deal with governmental authorities and social organizations, to respond to public calls upon their services and to collaborate with others in projects of social and economic development? Are these Assemblies not reinforced by the alert, loving support of the Continental Counsellors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, all of whose burgeoning energies are being skillfully coordinated by the International Teaching Centre—an institution whose augmented membership has already displayed a verve, a vision and a versatility evocative of warm admiration?

Tempting as it may be to dwell upon the positive features of our progress, better that we should be spurred on by them than that we should rest on our achievements. Let us continue, therefore, undeflected and confident, to seize the magnificent possibilities which the mix and blend of these ongoing processes and events allow for actualizing the immediate interests of our sacred Cause. These interests, to be sure, are identified in the major objectives of the Six Year Plan, on the second half of which we are now embarked, fully conscious of the not-too-

distant approach of the Holy Year, 1992-1993, and its significant commemorations.

In conjunction with the ever-widening thrust of teaching, we must proceed by every possible means with projects of the most critical importance. Work is continuing on the preparation for publication in English of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation. Arrangements must now be made for a befitting commemoration in the Holy Land of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. The plans for the World Congress in 1992 in New York must continue to advance on schedule. Moreover, further systematic attention needs to be given to the eventual elimination of illiteracy from the Bahá'í community, an accomplishment which would, beyond anything else, make the Holy Word accessible to all the friends and thus reinforce their efforts to live the Bahá'í life. Similarly, assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Bahá'í activities.

Regarding the projects on Mount Carmel, the Office of the Project Manager has been established, and a technical staff is being assembled. Geological testing at the sites of the designated buildings on the Arc is about to begin—a step preliminary to the ground breaking anticipated by the entire Bahá'í world. Hence, we seize this opportunity to apprise you of the urgency for the required funds both to initiate construction and to sustain this work once it has begun.

All these requirements must and will surely be met through reconsecrated service on the part of every conscientious member of the Community of Bahá, and particularly through personal commitment to the teaching work. So fundamentally important is this work to ensuring the foundation for success in all Bahá'í undertakings and to furthering the process of entry by troops that we are moved to add a word of emphasis for your consideration. It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá'í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá'í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.

Beloved Friends: The momentum generated by this past year's achievements is reflected not only in the opportunities for marked expansion of the Cause but also in a broad range of challenges—momentous, insistent and varied—which have combined in ways that place demands beyond any previous measure upon our spiritual and material resources. We must be prepared to meet them. At this mid-point of the Six Year Plan, we have reached a historic moment pregnant with hopes and possibilities—a moment at which significant trends in the world are becoming more closely aligned with principles and objectives of the Cause of God. The urgency upon our community to press onward in fulfillment of its world-embracing mission is therefore tremendous.

Our primary response must be to teach—to teach ourselves and to teach others—at all levels of society, by all possible means, and without further delay. The beloved Master, in an exhortation on teaching, said it is "*not until the candle is lit that it can shed the brightness of its flame; not until the light shineth forth that its brilliance can dispel the surrounding gloom*". Go forth, then, and be the "*lighters of the unlit candles*".

Our abiding love, unabating encouragement, constant, fervent prayers accompany you wherever you may go, whatever you may do in service to our beloved Lord.

[SIGNED: THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]