

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 1996

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Europe

Dearly loved Friends,

Forty-three years ago, when the European Bahá'ís gathered at the conference in Stockholm called by the beloved Guardian for the launching of the mighty Ten Year Crusade in your continent, you had but three National Spiritual Assemblies—those of the British Isles, of Germany and Austria, and of Italy and Switzerland—together with slowly developing local communities in the other countries of western Europe. In the east, cut off by political barriers, were tiny remnants of communities which had been raised up in earlier years and, in neighbouring Turkey, was a small, struggling national community. As the European believers of that time contemplated the awe-inspiring tasks before them, they heard the words of the Guardian, illuminating the historical significance of the continent in which they were to build the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Order:

A continent, occupying such a central and strategic position on the entire planet; so rich and eventful in its history, so diversified in its culture; from whose soil sprang both the Hellenic and Roman civilizations; the mainspring of a civilization to some of whose features Bahá'u'lláh Himself paid tribute; on whose southern shores Christendom first established its home; along whose eastern marches the mighty forces of the Cross and the Crescent so frequently clashed; on whose southwestern extremity a fast-evolving Islamic culture yielded its fairest fruit; in whose heart the light of the Reformation shone so brightly, shedding its rays as far as the outlying regions of the globe...

This, your continent, whose soil was blessed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, which was twice visited by `Abdu'l-Bahá in His epoch-making journeys following His release from imprisonment, whose travellers and scholars early responded to the dawning light of the Bábí Revelation, two of whose governments extended the hand of succour during the Heroic Age of the Faith, and whose nations, in recent years, have intervened so effectively in defence of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran, has amply demonstrated the capacity of its people to rally to the banner of the Cause of God, once their hearts are touched and their minds awakened to its Message.

In the course of these forty-three years the European Bahá'í communities have shown great vitality. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies has risen to thirty-four, covering the entire continent and embracing, in the case of Russia, vast territories as far as the Pacific Ocean. Great victories have been won for the Faith by European pioneers in Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean region and Greenland. Your institutions have distinguished themselves in external affairs. Your communities include outstanding scholars of the Faith, musicians, artists, scientists and those concerned with the application of Bahá'í Teachings to economics and

business. You have exerted special efforts for the advancement of women and the strengthening of family life. The European Bahá'í Youth Council provides a focal point and a source of stimulation to the youth in all parts of Europe, complemented by a network of National and Local Youth Committees closely linked to and supported by their National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now is the time to build on these achievements, clearly focusing all efforts on the central purpose of taking the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to a spiritually famished population.

The first task of your National Spiritual Assemblies immediately after Ridván will be to formulate, in consultation with the Counsellors, the details of the Four Year Plan, country by country. The participation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers in evolving their own local plans, and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be essential for the successful achievement of the high aims of this stage of the implementation of the Divine Plan of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

Europe is a continent of great variety, and each of your National Assemblies will be studying with care the processes and achievements required for the advancement of the Cause of God in its area during the coming four years. Each must consider the current condition of its community, the territory within which it is working, and areas of potential collaboration with other Bahá'í communities. Special attention will need to be paid to the attainment of official recognition in those countries where the institutions of the Faith are not yet legally incorporated, and to raising up National Spiritual Assemblies in certain of those independent countries and major islands, such as the Faroes, which have not yet attained them. There are, however, certain elements of an even wider vision which must be considered as they apply to specific countries, groups of countries and the entire continent.

There are areas which cry out for pioneers and travelling teachers; the mind turns, for example, to the work among the Sami and the other peoples of the arctic and sub-arctic areas as far north as Spitsbergen. We contemplate the significance of teaching the Faith in the islands of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the North Sea; the continent-wide importance of the Romany peoples, who have begun to show such receptivity to the call of Bahá'u'lláh; the opportunity for the European Bahá'í communities to demonstrate the salutary nature of the Teachings in relation to minorities of every kind; the specific tasks described by the beloved Guardian as the destiny of certain communities, and their responsibilities in far-flung lands where their languages are spoken; the implications of the advancement of the Faith in Italy where is to be found "*the heart and stronghold of the leading, the most ancient and powerful Church of Christendom*"; the need to rapidly increase the number of Bahá'í centres in the vast areas of the Ukraine and European Russia; and, beyond this, the special responsibilities and opportunities of the Bahá'í community of the Russian Federation, the larger part of whose area lies in Asia and must continue to benefit from collaboration with neighbouring communities of central, southern and eastern Asia as well as Alaska, Canada and the United States. All these are but some examples of the challenges which you face in the years ahead.

The central aim of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is of especial significance for Europe. You should have no misgivings—it is a process that can advance in all parts of Europe, in the west as well as in the east. All should recognize that entry by troops is an inevitable stage in the development of the Cause. The nature of the process is clarified in the compilation on the subject, whence it becomes apparent that the desired outcome, a sustained entry by troops, cannot be achieved by a mere series of spasmodic, uncoordinated exertions, no matter how enthusiastic. Confidence; unity of vision; systematic, realistic, but audacious planning; acceptance of the fact that mistakes will be made,

and willingness to learn from these mistakes; and, above all, reliance on the guidance and sustaining confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh will advance this process.

The establishment of training institutes in various locations is emphasized in the Four Year Plan because current methods, valuable though they are, are not adequate by themselves to meet the challenges of this new stage in the growth of the Cause. The character and structure of the training institutes must be adapted to the conditions of each country and region; clearly their form in Europe will not be identical with that of training institutes in the rural areas of India. Their essential functions, however, will be the same. They will foster a firm acceptance of Bahá'í identity in those who take part: the capacity to look upon the world and its conditions from the point of view of the Teachings rather than from the standpoint of one's nationality or non-Bahá'í background. They will help to develop in each participant a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, a good understanding of His essential Teachings and an awareness of the importance of developing the spiritual life of each individual through prayer, meditation and immersion in the Sacred Writings. They will also cover such practical matters as how to teach the Faith, for there are too many who, for lack of confidence in their ability to do so, are hesitant to convey the Message. The transformation that such deepening in the Faith produces will surely inflame the hearts of the individual friends with the longing to share this Message with those around them, and this is the seed of all success in teaching. Those who have attended training institutes will be able to help the other Bahá'ís, new and old, to increase their potential for teaching, and so to greatly increase the human resources of the Cause, in which every believer is a teacher.

The teaching of the Faith by the friends in Europe must increase in range; it must be varied, spontaneous and individual on the one hand, and focused, united and mutually supportive on the other. It must be both inspiring and practical and must, above all, be informed with serene faith in the power of Bahá'u'lláh. You should widen the field of your teaching work to include the country people and the masses labouring in the cities; people of little education as well as intellectuals in university towns. You should consciously approach every stratum of society, adapting your methods, literature and audio-visual materials to each audience. Both the heart and the mind need to be fed; both spiritual force and intellectual clarity must be recognized as vital elements of the teaching work. You have excelled in the use of the arts for the proclamation, expansion and consolidation of the Faith; this is a key to opening many doors and should be encouraged and developed. Your unity, enthusiasm, confidence and perseverance, strengthened and guided by the power of prayer, cannot fail to act as a channel for divine confirmations, which will be a magnet to seeking souls.

For our part, we shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that you, who have won such historic victories in your homelands and throughout the world, will enter during the Four Year Plan into a stage of even greater achievement, presaging the as yet unimaginable glories destined to unfold during the twenty-first century.

[SIGNED: THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]