

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 1996

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in North America: Alaska, Canada, Greenland and the United States

Dearly loved Friends,

As members of the North American Bahá'í community, you enter the Four Year Plan with a brilliant record of progress in fulfilling the mandate issued by `Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. In the eight decades since you received this mandate, your prodigious exertions have carried the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all parts of your continent, and throughout the length and breadth of the planet. You have played a critical role in the establishment of the framework of the Administrative Order and in the sustained proclamation of the Faith. These Tablets launched you on a worldwide enterprise which you, and the generations to succeed you, are called upon to continue during the vast period of time stretching throughout the Formative Age and into the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

In your pursuit of the provisions of the Four Year Plan on national, regional and local levels, in conformity with the detailed plans to be formulated in the weeks ahead, you should constantly bear in mind the one central aim of the Plan: advancing the process of entry by troops. There can be no doubt that this process, propelled by mysterious spiritual forces beyond the ken of the sceptic, will in due course quicken the souls of a multitude from every background in North America and dramatically increase the numerical strength of your communities.

Training institutes and other centres of learning are an indispensable element of a sustained endeavour to advance this process, and to ensure that the essential deepening of new believers is not neglected, that they develop the necessary skills to effectively teach the Faith, and that an opportunity is provided for all Bahá'ís, new and veteran, to embark on a systematic study of the fundamental verities of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. We look to your communities to make an energetic response to the call for such institutes, and to develop a wide variety of approaches fitted to the needs of the diverse components of your population.

In one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, `Abdu'l-Bahá, exhorting the North American believers to strive to attain the exalted station of Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, specifies firmness in the Covenant to be a prerequisite for this achievement. We urge you to manifest unwavering adherence to the provisions of the Covenant, while ever striving for a deeper understanding of its challenging features and of its implications, which far transcend the familiar arrangements of present society.

You are in a most enviable position to provide a mighty impetus to the teaching work. Through the alertness and perseverance of your institutions and the effect of your exertions,

there is now a general awareness of, and respect for, the Cause in your region, and the Faith has acquired a reputation for universality and liberality of thought. Well may you rejoice at this remarkable achievement, and well may you contemplate the present needs of the Cause with eagerness and confidence.

Your accomplishments have prepared the way for even more spectacular successes in the years immediately ahead. Now as never before should you strive mightily to free yourselves from the obstacles of apathy, attachment to worldly pursuits, and lethargy, which stand in the way of so glorious a realization. As the people around you yearn increasingly for a society in which rectitude of conduct prevails, which is animated by a nobility of moral behaviour, and in which the diverse races are firmly united, your challenge is to demonstrate the efficacy of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in ministering to their needs and in recreating the very foundation of individual and social life. The whole of North America stands in desperate need of the inspiring vision, the dynamic sense of purpose and the idealism, which can be provided only by those who are imbued with the spirit and truths of the Bahá'í Writings.

The community of the Greatest Name must increasingly become renowned for its social cohesion, and for the spirit of trust and confidence which distinguishes the relationship between believers and their institutions. In the earliest years of his ministry, the Guardian stated, "*...I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centres of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigour. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.*" Realization of this longing requires that you commit yourselves to the wholehearted support of your institutions. In turn, those of you called upon to serve as members of such bodies should ever be mindful of the attitude and manner prescribed for the conduct of their duties, and should strive continually to approach the exalted standard set out in the Teachings.

In the Divine Plan bequeathed to you by `Abdu'l-Bahá is disclosed the glorious destiny of those who are the descendants of the early inhabitants of your continent. We call upon the indigenous believers who are firmly rooted in the Bahá'í Teachings to aid, through both deed and word, those who have not yet attained that level of understanding. Progress along the path to their destiny requires that they refuse to be drawn into the divisiveness and militancy around them, and that they strive to make their own distinctive contribution to the pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, both beyond the confines of North America and at home. They should be ever mindful of the vital contribution they can make to the work of the Faith throughout the American continent, in the circumpolar areas and in the Asian region of the Russian Federation.

We direct the attention of the believers of African descent, so beloved by the Master, to the pressing need for pioneers, who will contribute to the further development of the Cause in distant areas, including the continent of Africa for which they were assigned a special responsibility by the Guardian when the first systematic campaign was launched for its spiritual illumination. Although their contributions to all aspects of Bahá'í service on the home front and elsewhere will be of great value, they can be a unique source of encouragement and inspiration to their African brothers and sisters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Increasingly over the years, the Bahá'í community in North America has been augmented by

the addition of a substantial number of believers who have come from the Cradle of the Faith. We urge all the friends of Persian background, who constitute a most valuable source of ability and experience, to dedicate themselves, to an extent surpassing their past services, to the accomplishment of the goals of the Four Year Plan, under the leadership and guidance of the institutions of the Faith in North America. The unity of thought and endeavour between the friends from East and West will offer a shining example of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to demolish traditional barriers and will be a powerful source of attraction to the Cause.

The Alaskan Bahá'ís are privileged to live in an area described by the Guardian as "*a region destined to play an important role in shaping the spiritual destinies of the great Republic of the West of which it forms a part, and to contribute, in no small measure, to the establishment of the institutions of His World Order throughout the American continent.*" The invaluable contribution they have made to the establishment of the Faith in Siberia in recent years, together with their significant advances in strengthening the home front, provide compelling evidence of their capacity to take full advantage of the opportunities before them in the Four Year Plan.

The valiant Canadian Bahá'í community was praised by the Guardian for "*the staunchness of the faith of its members, their unyielding resolve, their ceaseless efforts, their willingness to sacrifice, their exemplary loyalty, their steadfast courage,*" a description fully confirmed by the record of its achievements during the Three Year Plan. It has played a disproportionately great and much-appreciated role in the defence of the Faith, in its propagation to all corners of the earth, and in the establishment of its institutions in other lands, both near and far, and is in an enviable position to build upon these successes in the new Plan on which it now embarks.

Our thoughts turn often to the Bahá'í community of Greenland, whose staunchness of faith and dogged perseverance have won our admiration and praise, and have resulted in the Faith's becoming firmly established in that distant land. Inspired by the promise set out in the Tablets of the Divine Plan that "*if the hearts be touched with the heat of the love of God, that territory will become a divine rose-garden and a heavenly paradise, and the souls, even as fruitful trees, will acquire the utmost freshness and beauty,*" let them now go forth to claim new victories on the home front and to transform their nation through the power of the Divine Teachings.

Some four decades ago, Shoghi Effendi described the members of the United States Bahá'í community as "*the outstanding protagonists of the Cause of God; the stout-hearted defenders of its integrity, its claims and its rights; the champion-builders of its Administrative Order; the standard-bearers of its crusading hosts; the torchbearers of its embryonic civilization; the chief succourers of the down-trodden, the needy and the fettered among its followers...*" Any survey of the distinguished accomplishments of these dearly loved friends during the past three years provides striking evidence of the continuing applicability of this description, and of the immense contribution they are making to the advancement of the Cause. We look to the members of the Bahá'í community in the United States to perform, during the Four Year Plan, heroic deeds of service to the Cause, which will astonish and inspire their fellow-believers throughout the world.

In North America, there are opportunities for the advancement of the process of entry by troops, the like of which presently exist in no other place on earth. Three unique characteristics combine to give rise to this condition: the unparalleled strength of your local communities, particularly evident in the activity of your Local Spiritual Assemblies and in the consecration of the Bahá'í youth; the positive impression of the Faith which has been conveyed, not only to the

generality of the population, but also to leaders of thought and people of influence; and the composition of your nations, which have welcomed to their shores immigrants, students and refugees from all parts of the planet, drawn from all the major racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of humanity. You, who live in a continent described by `Abdu'l-Bahá as "*the land wherein the splendours of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, the home of the righteous, and the gathering-place of the free,*" are called upon to take full advantage of these favourable circumstances.

Dear Friends, now must you commit yourselves to the work of the Cause afresh, liberated from any doubts, uncertainties or hesitations which may have impeded you in the past. Every stratum of society must be brought within your embrace, as you vigorously advance toward the goal of entry by troops at this time when powerful spiritual forces are at work in the hearts of the people. Neither the affluent nor the indigent should be excluded from your purview. Receptive souls should be sought in the sophisticated circles of urban society, on the campuses of colleges and universities, in centres of industry and commerce, on the farms and villages of the mountains, plains and prairies—wherever are to be found human beings in search of the divine Truth. You should strive to create a Bahá'í community which will offer to the entire world a vibrant model of unity in diversity. The influence of your exertions can extend well beyond the confines of North America; in particular, French Canadian believers can perform an invaluable service to the Faith in the French-speaking nations and islands throughout the world, the Bahá'ís dwelling in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions can powerfully reinforce the work of the Cause in the circumpolar areas, and the friends of Hispanic background have fertile fields before them throughout Latin America. Let all believers consider the extent to which they can use familial and ethnic ties to other regions of the world for the fulfilment of the global mission conferred on the recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

At this critical hour in the fortunes of humanity, our eyes turn with eagerness and hope to the Bahá'ís of all parts of North America, who constitute a reservoir of human and material resources unmatched elsewhere in the Bahá'í world. As you proceed along your prescribed path, you should be ever mindful of these words addressed to you by the Author of the Tablets of the Divine Plan: "*I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements. The hope which `Abdu'l-Bahá cherishes for you is that the same success which has attended your efforts in America may crown your endeavours in other parts of the world, that through you the fame of the Cause of God may be diffused throughout the East and the West, and the advent of the Kingdom of the Lord of Hosts be proclaimed in all the five continents of the globe.*"

Our ardent prayers at the Sacred Threshold will surround and accompany you at every step of the momentous undertaking to which you are now summoned.

[SIGNED: THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]